A CAGE FOR LOVERS

BOOKS BY DAWN POWELL

SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY
THE BRIDE'S HOUSE
DANCE NIGHT
THE TENTH MOON
THE STORY OF A COUNTRY BOY
JIG-SAW, A PLAY
TURN, MAGIC WHEEL
THE HAPPY ISLAND
ANGELS ON TOAST
A TIME TO BE BORN
MY HOME IS FAR AWAY
THE LOCUSTS HAVE NO KING
SUNDAY, MONDAY AND ALWAYS
THE WICKED PAVILION
A CAGE FOR LOVERS

A CAGE FOR LOVERS

BY DAWN POWELL

1957 · HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY BOSTON
The Riverside Press Cambridge

Library of Congress Catalog
Card Number: 57-9982
First printing
The Riverside Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
Printed in the U.S.A.

A CAGE FOR LOVERS

HER HANDS clutched the desk as if it were a raft she had finally reached after tossing about in the open sea. She had to remind herself that this was not the end, only the first step in her journey, and released one hand to take the pen the room clerk was patiently holding out to her.

Was he staring at her because she bore suspicious signs of guilty flight? She had made the trip without haste, proceeding by foot and bus as demurely as if it were her daily routine. Surely he couldn't detect the thundering of her heart or the quivering of her knees. He went on staring, but his eyes were only making up his usual report for Madame Jouvel, proprietress of the Alexandria-Cherbourg. Expensive clothes, the report would say, French suit, little velvet twist of a hat, English topcoat over arm, one small bag of excellent leather, no jewelry except for wrist watch, worth,

say, fifty thousand francs, pearl earclips, no wedding ring. Young but over twenty. Pretty.

"Christine Drummond, Fairmount Village, New York," she wrote firmly on the register.

"Ah, America," the clerk said, proud of his astuteness.

"In a way," she said, already regretting having given her right name. But she was tired of behaving like a guilty criminal, as she had on those other occasions, hiding out like one, cringing, and eventually being captured like one. This time she would not concede that the desire for freedom, even freedom from kindness, was a crime.

The idea of escape had crept up on her like a disease she dared not face. The symptoms were familiar — weeks of high fever on waking, with the wild urge to run out of the house anywhere, in any direction, then the sinking back into routine and the dull ache of defeat until there came the blinding revelation that her decision was made. After that there was the sustained secret delirium with the brain whirring like a time bomb, marshaling its reasons, and under the calm mask of her everyday life, planning with almost lunatic cunning, watching and waiting for the moment. Finally the break, and the astonishment that the break itself was the easiest and least important part of the plot, because this, like the name of the disease, is the part that has always been known. Another part that is known — but this must never be acknowledged — is the eventual surrender. For by this time the cage was part of the bird.

"If I could only stop thinking like this!"

There ought to be special brain plugs, like those special

ear plugs Miss Lesley Patterson ordered from England, to keep you from hearing yourself think. Thinking was what betrayed you, handed you over to your enemies. The long view, it was called, but the long view was death. Only a concentrated selfishness, stubborn belief in the rightness of your own desires above all others, could carry you to triumph. A mind ought to be your obedient servant, justifying your caprices, tranquilizing your conscience. What chance did you have with a fair, decent, orderly, obstinately virtuous little nuisance of a mind, always pointing out the justice of the other side, always ready to appease, compromise — compromise, rot! — sell out!

I will not let myself think, she vowed fiercely.

She drew a deep breath for courage. This time she would not cringe. This time she would be strong enough to withstand the insidious kindness and tender understanding. She would not be won again with loving reproaches . . .

"But Tina, dear girl, if you were so certain you were doing the right thing, why did you have your trunk smuggled out at night, why did you pretend to be staying at your sister's when you were really on a train to New York? I can understand your wanting to have a little fling on your own — at least I can try to, though you insist there was no man involved — but I would have arranged a vacation for you — "

"I didn't want a vacation, Miss Lesley, I wanted to work, to do something on my own — "

"But darling, you know I would have been glad to help you. I would have arranged an apartment for you instead

of your cowering there at the Y.W.C.A. under another name. Why? Please tell me why."

Why why why why — Admit it was all a mistake. A momentary aberration. Accept with gratitude the forgiveness offered, the consolation gifts. Realize that you are a weakling, smothered under your childish loyalties. Learn your lesson about yourself. Only no lesson is learned, for two years later you tried again — and were captured again . . .

"Now that you're safely back I promise we won't speak of it again, Christine, dear, but one thing does puzzle me. If you were so resolved to take the nurse's training course, why couldn't you have discussed it with me? Have I ever lacked understanding where you were concerned? You could have been frank, dear, and we could have helped you. If you hadn't gotten sick and phoned your mother goodness knows what would have happened. The detectives might never have found you. But now that we've found you and we could talk about nursing you say you've changed your mind. Why?"

"Because I don't really want to be a nurse! All I wanted was to do something completely on my own, and the hospital would have sheltered me against you. And talking it over wouldn't have done. You wouldn't have helped me, we both know that; you would have shown me how such a career would waste all my talents, and we would have agreed that it was childish on my part to think I could conquer the world just by throwing away my crutches — "

She hadn't said that, of course. Instead she had mumbled something about being glad it was all over and that she

was back, because, worse luck, she was glad. If she'd had any guts she would have resented the discreet detectives who located her both times. Instead she was relieved, like any other criminal tired of hiding out, glad that the mounting sense of guilt was dissolved at last, glad to pay her proper duty to society.

"Is this your only luggage?"

For a minute Christine hesitated.

"My trunks — " she started to say but caught herself in the old habit of explaining, justifying, apologizing.

"Yes, that's all," she said crisply.

She had walked out with only the weekend bag, this time, for part of the strategy was to act as if this was no terrifying turning point in her life, merely a casual outing. She would not again go through the elaborate plotting to get trunks out ahead, only to have them returned a fortnight or so later without ever having been unpacked, necessitating all the silly excuses to the servants and all the long patient talks with Miss Lesley about why, why, why, and the embarrassment of having to clear up the meanings in her brave goodbye letters. No goodbye letters this time, no trunks, no dramatics about the independent life. Get through one day at a time, that was the idea. Don't look ahead or behind.

"Someone perhaps recommended this hotel?" persisted the young man staring at her across the desk, and Christine nodded.

All she knew about the Hotel Alexandria-Cherbourg was

that it was in the heart of town and that Miss Lesley Patterson hated the hearts of towns. Wherever they traveled (Miss Lesley's cars waited for them at all airports, docks and train depots) Miss Lesley's instructions were, "Drive out of town as quickly as possible." How many times Christine had looked back longingly at the bustling traffic of the crowded public squares, the great garish hotels, the open air cafés, the gay shops, the hurrying throngs, as the car nosed its proud way toward some lonely road into meadowlands and the country hush that was Miss Lesley's kingdom. Whether they were racing away from London, Miami, New York, or the simplest county seat Christine could feel the open fields, wide country sky, winding dust roads ahead waiting to close in on her with their familiar manacles. There was Miss Lesley's contented sigh, "At last!" meaning the hostile crowded city that neither knew nor needed Miss Lesley Patterson was vanquished, and soon there would appear a quiet little inn or perhaps a small château all specially ordered and arranged in advance for the gracious American lady, all red-carpeted by her couriers. Usually Miss Lesley's party — chauffeur, one of her lawyers, doctors, analysts, masseuses, an "interesting" guest or two, a distant cousin, a temporary dressmaker, Christine, somebody's student niece or nephew from home — would be the only patrons in the chosen stopping place. In no time at all the place would turn into Fairmount. Miss Lesley's trunks would disgorge her favorite photographs, etchings, books, records, dishes, tapestries, furniture; all would be arranged to look as much as possible like

the Fairmount mansion. Miss Lesley's favorite recipes would appear on the menu, for it would seem Miss Lesley's travels were not so much to see the world as to give the world a chance to see Miss Lesley.

Nor was it feasible to try and break away from Miss Lesley's little world of programmed duties and pleasures. Christine was usually delegated to be truant officer, rounding up members of the group who may have strolled to the village when the carefully considered plan was for everyone to have a picnic in the grove. She tried to get away with a new book or magazine or to savor her letters in the shade of a leafy hedge without the ever-interested eyes of Miss Lesley, the polite voice . . . *I take it your news is good from the way you're smiling, Tina* . . . But there was no privacy in Miss Lesley's world. You may have thought you were all alone but later on there would be merry chiding . . . *I hear you had a nice walk all the way to the pond instead of taking a nap as you told me you were planning. Marie tells me you were so deep in some new book you didn't even see her as she passed by. If it's that engrossing, my dear, why not share it with the rest of us, perhaps after dinner tonight* . . .

Only in the hearts of cities could you be alone . . .

Christine followed the young man up the narrow dark stairs, glad that it was up two flights. (Miss Lesley had persuaded herself that her heart would permit no stair-climbing.) Her head throbbed with the effort of controlling her excitement and her inner amazement that she had

really done it, this time, instead of dreaming it. She felt as if she had divided into two people, one, the bold, efficient Christine who managed everything fearlessly, the other a terrified creature numb with panic. How had she gotten here, she marveled, executing every step of the flight as precisely as if the details had been memorized for months in the depths of her consciousness . . .

The young man paused at a door marked "11" and she saw it was a battered, crooked door, so warped away from its hinges that it fell open at the first click of the key. She would be afraid at nights here, she thought at once, and could already picture herself sitting up in bed tensely listening to sinister footfalls in the hall, waiting for the door to be pushed slowly open . . . What on earth had made her cherish the name of this hotel? Someone — she couldn't remember who or where — had recommended it as convenient, cheap, quiet, with an English-speaking staff.

"The bath is down on the landing," said the boy. "Second floor back. You will let me know when you desire it. The charge for a bath is a hundred francs."

"None on this floor?" Christine exclaimed, surprised.

The inconveniences of independence, that was the part she had forgotten. The luxuries of Miss Lesley's life had seeped in so insidiously that it had never occurred to her that you had to ask especially for them . . . baths, heat, blankets, porters. She knew she would be afraid to go down the dark hall at night, afraid to take a bath, because of course the bathroom lock would be as ridiculously useless as the others. The calm, efficient Christine took charge of the cowardly Christine and frowned at her guide.

"I should like a better lock on my door," she said.

The young man looked pleased and nodded encouragingly.

"Speak English, that is right," he said.

"I *am* speaking English," she said and again he smiled encouragingly.

"Good! Fine!" he said. "I understand."

A man came out of a room down the hall.

"Monsieur!" greeted the clerk with a bow.

"Monsieur!" greeted the man, standing still and looking at Christine with frank interest. She tried to summon a forbidding scowl as if the two strangers had already threatened her. That was due to Miss Lesley's fatuous reading of danger in every eye that rested on her treasured "Tina."

"I was afraid that ticket agent was going to eat you right up when your hat blew off and he saw that angelic hair!" . . . "Poor Mrs. Dale was so wretched with all the men ogling you in that pink — "

"Then I will never take off my hat, I'll never wear pink," Christine would vow furiously. That funny little chiseled nose, those slender little ankles, that irresistible blushing, that proud little chin! Miss Lesley meant only to give her self-confidence with her tender compliments, but the public praise made Christine retreat in a panic of self-consciousness. Secretly she scolded herself for being too pleased with her hair, but that was because it seemed more like a pet with an identity of its own than a part of her. One day it would fall rakishly to one side and would not be disci-

plined, the next day it lay in demure rhythmic waves, and again for no reason it clung flat and shining to her head. Even the color changed from red to bronze, mousy and almost black. Taking off her hat she saw in the mirror by the door that today her hair was kinked, dark copper, and standing up stiffly like a frightened collie, wanting to draw away from this irresponsible mistress. She stroked it down impatiently, conscious of the clerk standing there in the doorway beaming.

"Is this your first trip to Paris?" he asked politely.

"No, I've been here before," she said. "First in 1946 and on short trips later."

"Then Mademoiselle knows Paris. Mademoiselle has traveled."

Indeed, indeed, she reflected sardonically. Ah yes; she had been places. As her mother and Jeanie said, "Christine has been everywhere! She's traveled all over, lucky girl! She's seen everything!"

"In gorgeous Cinemascope," she always said wryly, but it wasn't a joke. It had been like a giant movie, those views of the Bay of Naples, the Casbah, the Taj Mahal, like glimpsing them between Elizabeth Taylor's monster eyelashes, Tour Eiffel dwarfed by Franchot Tone's dimples, the hills of Rome nestling in the crook of Humphrey Bogart's Vista-Vision elbow. Yes, she had been all over the world in Miss Lesley's hotel suites, summer homes, winter lodges, cabin cruisers, ocean liners, and she had seen — everything? She had seen Miss Lesley Patterson, Miss Lesley filling the whole giant screen like Elizabeth

Taylor, Miss Lesley blown up larger than the pyramids or Radio City, Miss Lesley's directives coming from behind and above like the relentless sound track, and herself dubbing in different languages from her little handbooks, asking for the ladies' room in Swahili, demanding Tums in Albanian. At least she had learned not to try out her French in France, she reflected now, and was glad Gordon, the chauffeur, had teased her out of that error.

"Why stick your neck out?" he had asked after watching her struggle against a relentless barrage of *Comment?*'s. "In the army we learned that the only thing that keeps you out of trouble in foreign countries is not knowing the language. It's your alibi for breaking traffic laws. Once you speak their language you're in jail."

"You speak French and German. Why do you want to appear stupid?" she demanded angrily. "Why must Americans live up to their reputation for stupidity?"

"Americans lost their leadership when they started getting so smart and speaking languages," Gordon answered. "Our country got its start by refusing to speak anything but our own language. No to everything. Like the Russians today. *Nyet.* The Founding Fathers built up this country by not understanding anything but their own needs."

That was the sort of maddening thing Gordon said to her whenever he did deign to talk, mocking at her pride in learning new things. Sometimes she thought he hated her but even so she had to keep on his good side. They might never be friends but they were in the same boat and would

not dare make open war till they were out of it. If Miss Lesley's constant flattery made her cringe Gordon's deliberate indifference stung her into flamboyant coquetries and bold remarks. Last night at the Villa Topaze Christine had been tempted to tell him her plan, burning as she was with it. Even in his most hostile mood he would not betray her, she knew that. He looked so vulnerable, waiting there in the courtyard for Miss Lesley, his trim dark gray uniform emphasizing the crooked knee, his back thin and boyish. Two other chauffeurs were talking at the side of a big blue Daimler, and another driver was unloading bags from a little beige and black Peugeot. Sometimes his aloofness from other chauffeurs exasperated her just as much as the mocking way he "kept his place" among his betters did, but today the thought of how proudly he protected his loneliness made her heart ache for him. He was the one to rebel, she thought. In a surge of loyalty to him — he did come from her kind of people and they did belong together in spite of his stony hostility — she resolved to find some way to free him, too. He would never accept any favors from her, she knew that, but he needn't know the wonderful offer (she could almost see the dream letter inviting him to be manager of, say, a big machine factory, because he really was a mechanical wizard) was her doing.

Gordon must have felt the unwelcome rays from her imaginary benevolence for he turned toward her with the belligerent look that always prefaced a sarcastic attack.

"How come we're dumping the little princess on this jaunt?" he asked. "When did the Madam change her mind?"

"Last night," Christine replied, trying to keep her voice from betraying her bitter disappointment. She accepted a cigarette from his case and he lit it for her with the exaggerated flourish that made it less than a courtesy.

"I was wondering how long it would take her to get wise," he said, lighting his own just as if, she thought with rising anger, he was lighting a firecracker under her nose.

"Wise?" she couldn't help rising to the bait.

"Anybody with any sense could figure out what you were up to, the way you talk about Cousin John," he said. "The only reason you've hung around all these years is hoping the affair will start up again. The Madam's finally decided not to risk letting you meet him again."

Christine did not trust herself to speak, but she felt her cheeks redden.

"Sure," Gordon went on, evidently pleased at the effect he was having. "I could have told her before this what you were holding out for, telling other guys they weren't good enough for you. Only what you didn't seem to realize was that you're not good enough for Cousin John Lesley, when it comes down to it."

"What are you getting at?" Christine blazed.

"Oh I know, you're supposed to be one of the family, Miss Lesley's own little princess, right up to the point when you might *really* get your hooks into the family," Gordon went on, blowing a ring of smoke in the air. "Then the family honor is at stake and you find out where you stand. Right down in the kitchen with the rest of us. So you get left behind today. No chance for you to corrupt Cousin John again."

His malicious grin challenged Christine to control her anger. She blew a smoke ring that circled debonairly above his.

"My hard luck," she sighed elaborately. "I think I'll have consolation here, though, don't you?"

She flicked an ash in the direction of a gray-mustached Italian who had been beaming openly at her from the wheel of his Alfa-Romeo. Gordon stared from one to the other, scowling.

"So that was all your plan," he muttered. "I should have known you had something up your sleeve."

"Don't spoil it, will you, Gordon?" she begged him with a gay laugh. "I didn't think I had a chance against that Russian beauty but with you and Miss Lesley out of the way — "

Gordon swung a suitcase into the trunk of the Patterson car and banged the door. He had been outneedled and was not prepared.

"You pick the crumbiest," he said.

"We haven't much choice down in the kitchen, you know," Christine gleefully reminded him. "The chauffeurs are so fussy."

"As if you'd be bothered!" he said morosely.

"Don't tell me I'm not good enough for the kitchen, either!" Christine said. She was relieved that she had not trusted him too soon with her plan and put herself in his power, but her revenge for his thrusts had been too easy, and she was sorry for him again.

"She should have taken you along," Gordon said flatly.

"If I was in her shoes I wouldn't trust you here alone. In the mood you're in God knows what you're likely to do."

He astonished her occasionally by sensing things she hardly guessed herself. "The way" she'd talked about John Lesley, he had said. How? She must have given away more than she knew. The hope of meeting John again had been buried in the back of her mind for years, part of the reason for the marking time her life had become. Last night the shocked moment when Miss Lesley had told her she was not going to see him had been the final signal. With that one hope dashed there was no longer need to temporize. As if a bell had rung, there came the certainty that this was her time.

She thought of Gordon now as the clerk kept standing in the doorway staring at her. Gordon would sneer that she had encouraged him deliberately, as if no man would look at her unless she made some brazen bid for attention. In anyone but Gordon such a suspicious attitude would be flattering evidence of jealousy, but she knew better; it was just one of his ways of reducing her confidence. She had intended to ask if there were any rooms cheaper than the two thousand francs a day mentioned for this room, but such quibbling would be construed by Gordon as flirting for favors so she said nothing.

"Breakfast will be brought at whatever hour you choose," the young man said in his careful English. "Brioche and coffee or chocolate. For dinner there are many restaurants in the neighborhood. I am Michel, if you wish me. The maid, Marie, also speaks good English."

He turned to the door after one last look at the bronze hair and said, rather sternly, "Marie is my wife."

"*Merci, merci beaucoup,*" Christine said loudly, anxious to be rid of him. Gordon would have said her voice sounded as if she was grateful for the friendly warning about his wife and would try to be discreet in her amorous demands on him.

As the door closed on him the wonderful sense of triumph overwhelmed her. She'd done it! Exhausted with excitement and the long bus trip she flung herself on the bed. Now the plans that had been whispering in the back of her mind for so long could be gone over, but they all seemed to shriek at once. Get in touch with that agency in New York she had once consulted, find the little apartment, see this one and that one, look into the possibilities of the West Coast . . . Jumbled together they made no sense and she gave up trying to sort them out. All she could grasp was the amazing fact that she had *done it!* True, it was in France and not in America, where she had always planned it, but time was running out and when the gates swung open she had to run. Even if it had been in the middle of the Sahara she would have had to take the chance, that much she did know.

The bed was soft, too soft. There was an intimate odor of hair oil in the pillow and musty feathers in the comforter she had pulled over her. Without thinking she reached for a clean handkerchief from her purse to protect her face, and found the vial of smelling salts. Funny for *her* to be the finicky one, she thought sleepily, a little ashamed.

Miss Lesley always traveled with trunks of her own precious linen and bedding. Christine could remember — Was it so long ago? — when such precautions had seemed fantastic to her.

—

YES? . . . Just a minute . . . I'm right here . . . " A dozen times in the night Christine was awakened by the sound of her own voice answering some fancied summons. Each time she came awake sitting bolt upright reaching for the light, and once she had stumbled to the door before she came to her senses. Miss Lesley was not in the next room moaning in her sleep or crying out "Tina! Tina!" No need to fumble for sleeping pills, hot-water bag, thermos, rubbing cologne. Relieved, Christine would fall asleep again, but in the morning she had an uneasy feeling that other roomers on her floor must have heard her and wondered what was wrong. Probably Miss Lesley herself, in the Lucerne hotel, was being equally embarrassed by hearing herself cry out in the night. Like a telephone wire between them cut, the bell still ringing . . . She shut out the thought

of Miss Lesley needing her, of the lonely old woman sobbing that she had always had everything but no one — no one but Christine. It just wasn't true, that was all, as the last episode had proved, and she must steel herself against her gullibility.

A sense of suffocating under scented clouds of feathers woke Christine to her first day of freedom. The radiator was clamoring and spitting hot reminders that the *chauffage* proudly advertised was no mean boast. She stumbled out of bed to the window to close the shutters clattering in a damp cold wind. The window overlooked roofs and chimneys, from one of which billowed saffron-colored smoke streaked with dazzling purple, and there was a sweet smell of bakeries. The sky was November gray and the air shimmered with a pearly mist. Church bells were ringing, flagging sinners to early mass with a peremptory *bong-bong-bong* that seemed as hostile as the housekeeping noises from the corridor, angry broom swishing, pails banging, maids quarreling or perhaps merely chatting. She heard the pleasant sound of carts and horses' hoofs clopping down some cobblestone street she could not see. Presently she would go out and get her bearings, but for a little while she would sit, getting acquainted with her new quarters, convincing herself that she was alone and free, this was the dream come true.

She had been too tired to look at her room last night but now she saw that it was much fancier than she had demanded, almost two rooms, for the brass bed fitted into an alcove, hung with white embroidered ruffles drawn with

blue ribbon like a Victorian nightgown. A commode and washstand had a little closet to themselves, leaving a giant black walnut armoire to dominate the living room. Faded orange plush curtains and armchair must have done service for decades, but still sprouted tassels and fringe. A marble-topped round table by the bed bore a fat little bead-fringed red lamp, and a larger table desk offered a desk blotter, pen with no point, ink bottle with no ink and a glass paperweight with no paper. There was a flowery wallpaper screen to mask the dressing table, a pair of straight chairs, a rocker with footstool, and on the walls several tinted photographs of Seine fishermen. The sun, if the Paris winter ever had one, would never penetrate here, Christine judged, but there was something cozily private and homelike in the plushy darkness, something that reminded her of Fairmount.

Indeed in a surge of homesickness Christine thought the room bore a seedy resemblance to the parlor bedroom in her mother's house, the room set aside for Mr. Stoddard on his monthly visits to Fairmount. The rest of the little frame house was scantily furnished, but Mr. Stoddard had generously provided old furniture from his own big house in Albany, family stuff just going to waste in storage, he had explained. The furniture being Mr. Stoddard's Mrs. Drummond never let that room out to anybody else even when she could have used the money. There was a rosewood china cabinet, a canopy bed with handsome lace curtains, a big mahogany desk, rose carpet and thick velvet curtains. Closing her eyes Christine saw the room and the

old days vividly clear. After they had reverently cleaned and polished the room and were ready to close it up till Mr. Stoddard's next visit, Mrs. Drummond would draw Christine to the doorway, mops, dustcloths and vacuum cleaner stacked outside, and they would admire this elegant chamber as if it were a museum.

"I often wonder what Mr. Stoddard's home must be like," Mrs. Drummond often sighed, "when he puts beautiful pieces like these in storage. It must be a palace. I'd give anything to see it, but then we've never seen his family, either. He's a very reserved man, Mr. Stoddard is, but what a Rock of Gibraltar for us!"

Christine and Jeanie stood in awe of the guest, since they were always shushed the minute he came in. He was a big gray man, always preoccupied, who took his bulging briefcase into his room and closed the door when he arrived, emerging for an early breakfast, then disappearing in his Buick for another month. He remembered their birthdays handsomely and sent baskets of fruit to them from Florida and shipments of sea delicacies from New England.

"We've got a lot to thank Mr. Stoddard for," Mrs. Drummond said.

"A big city lawyer like that could be staying at the Wharf Club, if he wanted," Christine observed.

"That's just it. That's Mr. Stoddard for you, a great big heart," her mother said. "He'd rather stay here and bring his own furniture for our use because he knows how much that extra money means to us."

Once Christine, eager to show off the grand secret cham-

ber, brought in a curious school chum and was startled by her mother's burst of anger.

"Mr. Stoddard wants his property to himself," she scolded. "Do you want to set the whole village gabbing?"

It was the first time her mother had criticized her as if she was a child instead of an equal, and in her humiliation Christine responded in a childish way by deciding she didn't like Mr. Stoddard's furniture anyway. She preferred their own plain chairs and tables, she declared rebelliously, because you could scrub them and make them work for you instead of your working for them. Furniture was to be used every day instead of just looked at.

Mrs. Drummond recognized her own words in defending their simple possessions and burst out laughing. She restored Christine's dignity by assuring her that she had more sense than anyone twice her age, and the fact of the matter was that they were a pair of solid, sensible women who kept their feet on the ground and saw eye to eye on everything.

But almost overnight Mrs. Drummond started seeing eye to eye with Miss Lesley Patterson, too, or earnestly trying to do so, and this made Christine's first year away from home bewildering. The only fun in her new routine was thinking of her mother's astonishment when she heard of the strange Patterson customs. It was disappointing that her mother obstinately refused to be surprised or critical.

"You say you collected a half-bushel of mushrooms and Miss Lesley never even knew they grew all over her place?

Then you took her out and showed her how to find them. You silly child, don't you realize their cook would rather order them from the market?"

"But it's so wasteful," Christine protested. "Besides I love gathering mushrooms and there's not enough for me to do. Miss Lesley likes me to teach her things like that, because her governesses just taught her from books. She tells me how she loved watching the garden and that she begged to follow Doc MacNeil when he was tending to the sick dogs or horses, but no one ever told her she could raise her own garden or tend her own animals. I told her if she'd done that she wouldn't have had to spend her time having headaches in her room and worrying that nobody liked her."

"Oh Tina, honey!" Mrs. Drummond laughed. "I hope Miss Lesley will never have to work like we do."

"Why not?" Christine was taken aback by her mother's protest. "You always said real people *wanted* to do things for themselves whether they had to or not. And she thinks so, too, only nobody ever allowed her to. I showed her how to make a soufflé the other day, and she was so happy. Then she was afraid Mrs. Duffy might be upset at our fussing in her kitchen, so that's out. She says I can show Mrs. Duffy how I do it, but what fun is that?"

"You should be glad you don't have to do the cooking," her mother said.

"But I like to do things myself, Mother, the way you and I do," Christine grumbled. "For instance, I found a wonderful solid old box in the shed, and I scraped and lacquered it, and made a little corner cabinet for my room. I was so

proud I showed it to Miss Lesley and all she said was, 'Oh, you poor child, how thoughtless of me! I'll have Waldo give you the teakwood cupboard from the old nursery.' "

"Well, the rich do things differently, that's all," her mother said comfortably. "You'll just have to learn to relax. Think of it as a vacation."

"But if I relax I may forget everything I do know by the time I get a real job," Christine said. "Even my own washing. When Miss Lesley found me washing out some lingerie she scolded Cathy for letting me do such a thing. I told her I liked to and she just laughed as if that was a joke and said, 'Child, that's what Cathy's here for.' And then having to dress up every night as if we were going to a prom, even when there's just the two of us in that great big dining room!"

Mrs. Drummond shook her curly red-gray head in amused reproach at her daughter.

"She buys you the dresses, doesn't she?" she reminded her. "Not but what those pretty little prints you designed yourself weren't good enough . . ."

"That's just it, Mother!" Christine interrupted. "I'm always so proud of making my own clothes and having people mistake them for expensive originals — that wedding dress I made for Jeanie, too, remember — and the layette they thought was French. Miss Lesley is awfully complimentary about my sewing, but next thing I know a grand new dress comes for me from some de luxe shop, as if she wanted to show how much better she could do it, just with money."

"You've got to admit it's fun getting all those fancy clothes," Mrs. Drummond said as Christine ruefully nodded. "Let her buy them if it keeps her in a good humor."

"I suppose I can knit afghans and do petit point," Christine sighed. "That's what she does. And crossword puzzles. I guess she wants me to do whatever I *do* with her and never have any private interests."

She thought her mother would be amused to hear of the serious conferences every morning at ten over menus for the day, even if the only guest would be John Lesley, Miss Patterson's young cousin. But Mrs. Drummond was awed.

"So that's the way they do," she mused. "Honestly, Tina, you must feel embarrassed at the way we've always just slapped a meal together down here."

"But ours are every bit as good," Christine protested. "You know you've always said the most important thing about meals was to have them when you're hungry. And if the cut was right there was no sauce could improve it. And . . ."

It was hard to say whether their faint irritation with each other was due to Christine's baffled surprise at her mother's contrariness in forgetting her own old precepts, or to Mrs. Drummond's impatience with her daughter for remembering them. She was sensible enough to know she couldn't quiet Christine by explaining that poverty's precepts were only good for poverty, to be thrown away like darning needles when you got a dozen pairs of new socks.

"I just don't want to get so spoiled, Mother," Christine said, placatingly, her arm around her mother. "I might not

get a husband who'd bring me breakfast in bed. After all, you didn't."

"The trouble is you don't have enough to do," her mother conceded, but she was shocked when Christine, agreeing, said she planned to take some university extension courses.

"Indeed you mustn't, Tina," she said. "It would look as if you were just using this nice job to prepare yourself for something else."

"But Mother," Christine exclaimed, "that's just what I am doing. I couldn't be stuck doing nothing all my life, could I?"

Her mother shook her head affectionately.

"Sometimes I could just shake you, Tina," she sighed. "You don't know how lucky you are. You're secure, aren't you?"

There wasn't any use telling her mother that at eighteen it took more than a good bed and meals to feel "lucky," or even secure.

Miss Lesley's idea of offering Gordon MacNeil a job cheered up Christine that first year, for John Lesley had been whisked off to a European base hospital and the house was dead without him. Gordon was the oldest son of Dr. MacNeil, the veterinary who had always looked after the Patterson animals, and who lived in a ramshackle old farm near the Drummonds' cottage. His wife dead, the doctor's brother and family had joined forces with him to look after the home and business. As a child Christine and Jeanie had played around the MacNeil kennels, but Mrs. Drum-

mond always scolded that they were bringing back mange and fleas to Mr. Stoddard's precious Aubusson carpet. Besides she hated any connection with the doctor, who had been an old drinking crony of her derelict husband. She did concede that the oldest boy, Gordon, showed some ambition, working after hours at the gas station and saving money for engineering school, but she disapproved when he brought Christine home from school in his old station wagon. Christine herself was secretly thrilled by these favors. He was a few years older than herself and ignored the high school girls to go steady with a blonde from the river boarding school. He left for Polytechnic but was called back his second year to look after the complications of his father's suicide and other family problems. That was the time Miss Patterson thought of sending for him to take the place of her old chauffeur. Christine, in her first year there and already lonesome, was excited at the idea of companionship. But she never forgot the day he came to answer Miss Lesley's summons. He leapt out of his little Chevvy at the front door and ran up the porch stairs, where Christine was sitting in her faded blue denim shorts, sorting out seeds. He was in work clothes himself, with a stained leather windbreaker thrown over his shoulders, and Christine couldn't help wondering how he would like being caught, like a wild horse, and put in a natty chauffeur's uniform. He grinned at her.

"I was wondering whatever became of you, Tina," he said. "Thought you'd gone to college or got married. You working here?"

Christine nodded.

"Maybe I'll drop by some evening," he said, sitting down beside her and offering her a cigarette. "You're allowed to have dates, I hope?"

She didn't know what to say, but she knew Miss Patterson would not like the two of them to be sitting out there so boldly. She didn't like his assumption that she was lonely and he was conferring a favor by calling.

"Miss Patterson wants to see you upstairs in the library," she said, standing up.

"If it's about her dogs I'm not taking any of my father's old business," he said. "I thought she knew that, but okay, I'll go up."

Barely twenty minutes later he came bursting out the door. His face was flushed and he looked angry. He seized Christine's arm.

"Look, whose idea was this, anyway?" he demanded. "Why did she send for me?"

"She admired you — I mean she thought you were ambitious — " Christine stammered.

"Ambitious to be somebody's chauffeur? Are you kidding?" He laughed disagreeably.

"She only meant to fill in after Waldo leaves, while you're winding up your father's affairs," Christine tried to explain.

"I'll settle my affairs in my own way, thank you," he said. "If I have to wear a uniform it'll be for the U.S. Army and not livery for Miss Patterson, you can tell her. What did you two take me for, anyway?"

He wrenched open his car door and jumped in, leaving Christine with the impression that she herself had mortally insulted him. Evidently he had not vented his indignation on Miss Patterson but blamed Christine for suggesting him for a menial job. He did enlist in the army the very next month, and they heard of him through the town newspaper from time to time, how he was stationed in Texas, wounded and hospitalized in France his first year in the war, invalided home, then confined to the veterans' sanitarium in Kingston with tuberculosis. When he appeared back in Fairmount Village again, they said he was a different lad, with many chips on his shoulder. His blond girl from the river school was with the Red Cross in England, some said married to an English colonel; he had no family left and his house was sold, so he roomed in the Inn and worked in a mechanics shop part time, since he was still not strong enough for a big job; his pals were still in the thick of the fighting so that he bitterly hated his ruptured duck. In fact, so gossip said, he was an embittered, discouraged young man, and when Miss Lesley heard of it she sent for him again.

It had been three years since Christine had seen him and when he drove up in the same old Chevvy, she welcomed him warmly. She could not tell whether his indifferent response was because of the illness that had left him gaunt and weary, or because he still resented their last encounter. He must have known what Miss Lesley wanted of him this time, she thought, and couldn't blame her again for insulting his pride.

In her study Miss Lesley sat behind the great flat-topped ebony desk that had been made by some Colonial ancestor. At a tea table or even at the head of her own dinner table she was a timid, self-conscious little mouse, but at her father's desk she too was a general. From this desk her fathers and grandfathers had bawled out their commands to servants, family and friends, and the minute Miss Lesley sat there she bloomed with power, as if it was transmitted from some unseen dynamo. Enthroned here she wrote her advice on choice of colleges, careers, marriages, to the dozens of relatives, old employees, indigent artists, and family friends; accompanied by checks the "advice" became commands and the little empire of semidependents grew and gratified the little woman. Whatever made her determined to have Gordon MacNeil, Christine couldn't guess, unless she was challenged by his independence. Other village families, in times of trouble, invariably appealed to Miss Lesley Patterson for help and since his father had served the Patterson family for years it would have been natural for the son to come to her. He hadn't. But it was clear he would offer no resistance to her offer of a job.

"It isn't just a chauffeur I require, Gordon," Miss Lesley explained. "It's a sort of courier, too. When we travel I expect you to make arrangements for our stopping places, with Christine's help, of course. I hear you are a wizard mechanic, which Waldo never was, so you will recommend the cars I should buy and keep them in condition. Cathy and Mrs. Duff drive themselves marketing, but you will

meet our guests, tour with us, and take me to the city once a month for shopping."

"Not New York," Christine was impelled to interpose.

"No, I dislike New York," Miss Lesley explained carefully. "I'm afraid it's a great disappointment to Tina, who glamourizes the place. I find it shoddy and rude nowadays. I go to Albany or Boston, where the shops still remember me. Now, as to salary — "

Gordon agreed brusquely to the offer, as if nothing mattered to him one way or other, except getting a regular salary.

"I've watched Gordon grow up just as I've watched you, Tina," Miss Lesley said, beaming with satisfaction. "We'll be like one family."

"That's nice," Christine said, wanting so much to be friendly but put off by Gordon's cold eyes. "I'm glad you're back, Gordon."

"I didn't intend to come back," Gordon said, looking past her. "But it turns out this knee won't let me do a lot of things — not for a while, anyway, maybe never. I'm satisfied to get a job I know I can handle."

"Show him where he's to live, Christine," Miss Lesley said.

He followed Christine out of the house down the driveway to the laurel-covered garage where old Waldo and the colored yard man had rooms. The housekeeper and what was left of the kitchen help lived in the old dairy directly behind the big house. Gordon was to have a small bed-sitting room next to Waldo's apartment.

"Looks okay," he said, and then asked, "Where do you stay?"

"I have a room next to Miss Lesley's," Christine answered. "The nurse doesn't come regularly, and Miss Lesley refuses to have any men servants sleep in the house."

She hadn't meant to say "servants" but Gordon seemed to pay it no mind, just blowing a smoke ring casually and looking at her.

"I'll say you've dug yourself in very well," he said. "What are you supposed to do here, anyway? Or isn't that any of my business?"

"I'm sort of companion-secretary to Miss Patterson," Christine answered stiffly.

He whistled, pretending to be mightily impressed.

"Just like an heiress, they tell me," he said. "Under the circumstances I couldn't call you Tina like we did in school, I suppose. Miss Drummond, of course."

"Suit yourself," Christine retorted, fuming at his tone.

He blew another smoke ring upward and said, "Naturally you call me Gordon. Or is the chauffeur called by his last name? MacNeil, then."

"I'll call you Gordon," Christine said as calmly as she could. "You will have five days off monthly, more when you wish, separately or all at once so you can visit your family."

"Any family I care about is gone," he said. "I'll probably spend my free time right here. I understand you've more or less dropped your family in the village."

Christine flushed. She had not guessed the town had noticed the widening breach between her mother and sister's family and herself, but of course they would construe it as her fault.

"What was the trouble? Star boarder crowd you too much?"

She knew he was determined to needle her but she was equally determined to keep her temper.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she replied.

"Okay, skip it," he said, with a shrug.

She reminded herself of the hurt to his pride in having to come back for a job he had once scorned. Allowances must be made for his antagonism.

"When Waldo leaves next month you'll get his apartment," she said. "You'll find it more comfortable than this room."

"Fine," he said. "Lucky I don't have to sleep in the boss's pocket like you do."

She wanted to fly back at him, but he was limping swiftly across the driveway to his little Chevvy. After that, he maintained an attitude toward her of exaggerated respect, snapping to formal attention if she appeared when he was joking with Cathy or the Duffys. If, on the other hand, she was in the kitchen gossiping with the help, he studiously refused to join them, but as soon as she went back upstairs she could hear him laughing with them. She knew the others were fond of her but there was always that barrier of being Miss Lesley's representative, a spy from upstairs, no matter how you looked at it. Gordon made that clear to her.

Even on these prickly terms each was secretly glad of a contemporary in the household. The mansion was several miles from the village, high up the wooded hill and far from other dwellings. Since Miss Lesley must never be left alone and the older servants turned in right after dinner, the nights were desolately lonely. Alone in their different quarters it was some consolation to think of another young person equally lonely, nearby. Before Gordon had come, Christine would sit at the window of her room looking down through a black blur of trees at the moonstruck river, listening to the train whistle echoing forlornly from the other shore, inordinately cheered when a stray deer wandered below her window and stood motionless staring at her. She would think about her mother and how strange it was that with less than a dozen miles between them they were so far apart, and even her life with her mother, happy and even gay as it seemed at the time, was far, far away and almost incomprehensible. Later, after Gordon's arrival, Christine would wait until Miss Lesley was asleep, then go down to the basement game room, where Gordon had unearthed an enormous old phonograph with a stack of old records of the Twenties which they would play in their periods of truce. When Miss Lesley heard about this, she said warmly, "How like you, Tina, to make Gordon feel at home here. But, my dear child, don't forget he *is* a man easily tempted and you are a very beautiful young girl. I do feel so responsible to your mother, you see."

"You make me feel like Cleopatra tempting Mark Anthony," Christine laughed.

But there was disapproval behind Miss Lesley's fond smile, and thereafter Christine was embarrassed to go downstairs and went to her own bedroom when the mistress retired. She would sit at her window straining her ears for the tinny echoes of "Lady, Be Good" and "Red Lips, Kiss My Blues Away," and when the sounds stopped she leaned out to watch Gordon, only his cigarette visible, strolling across the driveway to the apartment he had inherited from Waldo.

After a while he installed a record player in his own quarters with a collection of jazz records he played for himself at nights. He invited the kitchen help but never Christine to listen, and she consoled herself with the thought that Miss Lesley wouldn't like her to go anyway. Sometimes she could hear his car creaking softly down the driveway at midnight and she would listen for it to come back at daybreak. Those nights he spent, she knew, at the roadhouse up the highway, the one known as the Pilot Ship, which represented to the Fairmount Village youth the height of fast life. Christine felt a twinge of jealousy at his freedom to go there, even though Miss Lesley had looked down on it as another vulgar invasion of American (i.e., Patterson) soil.

From the kitchen talk Christine learned Gordon was also taking some extension courses that involved mysterious blueprints and night study, that he dated gay girls in surrounding towns but refused to get caught in any serious affair. She heard that he had offers of positions elsewhere but preferred his chauffeur's job as giving him time for his

studies. She thought it was for her benefit he behaved like a movie chauffeur, exaggerating his camaraderie with the kitchen help, stiffening to mock servility whenever she spoke to him. There were many times when she longed to talk about their mutual school friends or village events. She wondered if he felt the same sense of loss she did, cut off from her old life, but not belonging to the new. Gordon, however, froze her overtures. When she inquired about old neighbors he shrugged and said coldly, "If you're so interested in them why don't you go see them? You could show them how much better you're doing than they are."

He must have had a smoldering resentment of her superior position in the household. Self-consciously she swung from anxious attempts to be friendly, and then, rebuffed, to a haughty pose of flaunting her authority.

One day, in a desperate mood, she had hidden in the summerhouse high in the woods for the simple purpose of crying, a luxury Miss Lesley enjoyed daily, but which Christine seldom dared afford. She was startled by a hand briskly shaking her shoulder.

"Snap out of it," Gordon said.

Christine swallowed hard, not trusting herself to speak.

"Just what have you got to cry about?" he asked, staring down at her curiously. "I should think you'd be all hopped up, leaving for Italy next week."

She reached in the pocket of her slacks for a cigarette and lit it, puffing furiously for control of herself.

"Thinking what a hard life you've got, eh?" Gordon said. "Pretty clothes, nothing to do but change them, travel — what's so tough about it?"

"You talk like my mother," Christine was stung into retorting. "As if there was nothing in life except having things. There's got to be some meaning to them, hasn't there?"

"Like what?" Gordon asked.

"What good is a view of the Bay of Naples if you're all alone? What good is it going someplace just to be going and coming back just to plan going someplace again?" His sudden laugh sounded sympathetic and she burst out, "I know I'm getting advantages that I used to wish for but I wanted them as rewards for having done something, not as a career in themselves."

"What'd you want to do, then?" he demanded.

"That's it," she said. "Now I don't know any more. I've let myself be sidetracked so long I don't know where the real tracks are. It scares me to find myself planning the future and then realizing that *this* is the future and it's spoiling fast. It's as if I'd been drugged and the train was leaving without me."

"I guess you're afraid you won't get married," he said.

Christine made an impatient gesture.

"A man would think that was all it was," she retorted. "I suppose that's in the back of every girl's head just like getting rich is in the back of every boy's head, but what I wanted to prove first was that I am somebody. Can't you understand that?"

She ground her half-smoked cigarette under her foot on the flagstones. She knew Gordon was watching her and she knew there would be a mocking twitch to the corner of his

mouth. She was sorry he had led her into exposing her feelings.

"I don't see what you've got to worry about," he said calmly. "Anybody seeing you tossing your head and swinging your hips around here would think you were somebody. I notice most of the big-shot old guys that visit here seem to think you're somebody."

She lit another cigarette in silence, determined to ignore the implications of his remark.

"Where do you think you'd have gotten someplace else?" he persisted, equally determined to needle her. "Supposing you'd stayed down in the village with your mother, helping out with the roomers, maybe teaching school. Or maybe gone to college and gotten a job in New York like some of these other kids, secretary to some creep, holing up in some little room in Greenwich Village."

"Even if I couldn't have done better than that it would have been my own life," she flashed sharply. "My room would have been my own. My friends would have been my own."

"What kind of friends, I'd like to know?" Gordon demanded sarcastically. "Do you think being on your own you would be calling the governor by his first name the way you do now? Do you think you'd be making jokes with judges and bankers and visiting big shots the way you do here? Friends! You've got the cream of them handed to you here."

It was the way her mother and Jeanie talked, and indeed the way Miss Lesley talked. For a while Christine herself

had believed these fine people really were her friends but the delusion passed after she had encountered them when she was alone, and found they regarded her only as a part of dear old Lesley, a very nice part, but still not at all a person in her own right. It would have alarmed them, she knew, if she had suddenly taken their affection personally and appeared alone at their door like a riderless horse.

"Nobody wants friends handed to them," Christine said impatiently. "It can't be done, really. I'm not myself with any of those people, I'm a shadow of Miss Lesley. Pretty soon I won't be able to be anything else, because I will have forgotten what I am. It's as if all the investment of growing up and planning what I would be was a total loss. Like perfume put away for a long time, then when you come to open it, it's evaporated."

Gordon frowned, not understanding or perhaps not wanting to understand. He reached down under the bench for a box of garden tools.

"Whatever you were planning for yourself, you can't tell me you didn't want lots of the things you've got right now," he said, "and you've got to admit you wouldn't have gotten them so fast."

"Sure, I wanted them," she said. "You wanted to drive a big car when you grew up, didn't you, when you were a little boy? That didn't mean you'd be satisfied to drive it for somebody else!"

"I'm not the one that's kicking," Gordon retorted. He picked up the box and turned to go.

"You must see how it is," she said. "It's the same with you."

He shook his head and smiled, an odd grim little smile.

"Not the same at all," he said. "I'm the chauffeur. When I couldn't have what I wanted I had sense enough to take what I could get. I'm not kicking. It's okay. A war and a dame straightened me out."

"It's not okay," Christine cried out passionately. "You lie when you say you haven't any other ambition, because Cathy told me how you study — "

"Never mind about me," he interrupted, picking up the box of tools. "You're the one that's crying. If you're so sick of this gilded cage just remember you've still got your wings. You're the one that keeps clipping them."

He strolled away down the hill, leaving Christine angry and humiliated at having given him the chance to snipe at her. She resolved to keep her distance hereafter, but it was an effort to maintain a grudge, and soon she was blithely making overtures again, forgiving him because he must be unhappy, willfully pretending his sullen responses were meant as wit.

There was the night she put on her new dinner dress, the white organza over cherry taffeta that Miss Lesley had ordered for her from Hattie Carnegie. Miss Lesley herself wore the same style of clothes year in and year out, so it was surprising how much pleasure it gave her to see the latest fashions on Christine. It was fun having these handsome packages arrive from smart shops with unexpected gowns, furs, or hats planned so carefully and lovingly to suit her form and coloring. This gown, a birthday gift, was so

gay and charming, leaving her shoulders bare, with red ribbons like reins fluttering from her throat, that Miss Lesley insisted they must drink pink champagne to celebrate it.

They dined alone at a little table by the window in the great dining room, from where they could watch the lights twinkling on the other shore and the boats glide in golden shadows far below on the river. Miss Lesley had chosen the "Three Waltzes" album for their dinner music and Yvonne Printemps's sad, gay soprano soared through their conversation. Birthday, the glittering shore, the dark romantic Hudson, the dress, music and champagne made Christine's heart beat fast, as if she was on the eve of something wonderful, something she could not even imagine, something special for her alone, until some break in the music obliged her to leave the window table to adjust the phonograph. The lonely, dark-paneled dining room with the great empty table, the unlit crystal chandeliers catching flickers of gold from the candles on the little table, the huge sideboards and gloomy full-length portrait of a dour Revolutionary general seemed suddenly to overwhelm her. The gay future lay somewhere out the window on that other shore but the present was overpoweringly here. In that moment of breathless, nameless fear, Miss Lesley called out from the table.

"On second thoughts, turn off the music, Christine," she said. "How disgusting of me to have a headache come on just at this moment! Can you forgive me if I leave you to finish alone? I have to lie down immediately. No, no, I won't have you leave your birthday cake. You stay right here and finish your champagne, my dear."

So Christine went back alone to the little table in the prettiest dress she had ever had, but the champagne seemed flat now, the magic gone. The table was part of the funereal interior, and no gateway to cloudland. There was nothing ahead for her but to go to her room, take off the dress and go to bed. She snuffed out the candles on the table, as Cathy, the waitress, switched on the lights to clear away.

"It's a beautiful dress, Miss Drummond," Cathy said, staring in admiration. "I was doing my best to describe it to Mrs. Duffy downstairs. All those tiny little pleats and the work on those petticoats! I was telling Mrs. Duffy — "

"I'll run down and show it to her," Christine cried eagerly.

She skipped down the back stairs to the downstairs dining room behind Cathy. At the table Mrs. Duffy, the cook, and her husband, the gardener, were sitting over their coffee listening to the news. Gordon, in the blue corduroys he wore off duty, was standing beside the door having a last sip of coffee before going out. Christine pirouetted, swirling the starched white lace petticoats under the cherry taffeta for Mrs. Duffy's benefit, and even Gordon burst out in applause. Mrs. Duffy and Cathy minutely examined the ruffles, the way the bows were tied, the complicated underlining.

"You ought to be going to a party," Mrs. Duffy declared. "Such a pretty dress, such a pretty girl, and no young man to see her but Gordon here."

"It's a real shame," agreed Cathy. "You ought to be going somewhere, shouldn't she, Gordon?"

"Get your coat and I'll take you to the Pilot Ship," Gordon offered. "There's always something going on there."

Her head quite turned by this concession from her enemy, Christine flew upstairs for her cape, and mindful of possible obstruction from Miss Lesley, tiptoed back down the back stairs out to the lower driveway where Gordon's car waited. It was a lovely October night with the smell of pines and dying bonfires in the air, a pumpkin moon in the sky. Christine wished they could speed along the highway in this blissful champagne mist straight to Montreal. The Pilot Ship had a gay neon flag and nautical façade spangled with colored lights. Several cars were parked in the illuminated circle around the entrance and the reverberations of an orchestra booming out "Long Ago and Far Away" promised ineffable magic within.

The interior of the inn might have disappointed anyone less eager than Christine, for it was a bare barn of a place touched up with ship models, coiled ropes, seagoing effects. The orchestra was only a giant jukebox, and not more than a score of guests were scattered about the place, including the few men standing at the bar. The bartender greeted Gordon as an old customer, and the men stared at Christine. A head waiter in tuxedo lent a touch of worldliness, slightly marred by his calling Gordon by his first name, and the fact that there was only one other waiter.

"Dull night," Gordon said to Christine. "We'll have a drink at the bar and a dance and then dust."

It did not seem at all dull to Christine, delighted at her

release. Nor did she mind that her dress was much too fancy for the place. Gordon was a good dancer and they danced silently and intently, as if it was a hunger that must be appeased, hardly pausing between numbers.

"Oh Gordon, I forgot your bad knee," Christine exclaimed contritely.

"Do it good," Gordon said, but she was ashamed of having forgotten his wound in her selfish excitement, and did not protest when he suggested they leave.

"It's the most fun I've had since I came here," she confessed when they got back in the Chevvy.

"We'll do it again when it's a big night," he said.

But they never did.

Driving home in the clear midnight hush Christine sang softly, thinking happily of the exciting door her birthday had opened, feeling part of the gay world of those other cars they met or passed, speeding to or from romantic rendezvous. How wonderful to be out in this magic world, how nice Gordon was, how much fun it was going to be now that they were friends! He turned off the car lights and drove cautiously through the grounds, stopping at the dairy. She knew he was going to kiss her when he helped her out, but the fierceness of his embrace made her pull away breathlessly and run ahead. At the door of the mansion he caught up with her, but Miss Lesley was waiting for her in the downstairs hallway.

She was at the foot of the staircase, clutching the newel post, a square implacable little figure in a high-collared purple silk robe that rattled like sheet-iron with her angry

trembling. Her face was deathly white except for clownish red blotches on her cheeks.

"Miss Lesley!" Christine gasped.

Miss Lesley opened her mouth convulsively, swallowed hard and then panted, "I had no idea you were going out with Gordon. You should have told me. I called and called. My head — Will you see me up to bed, now, Christine?"

For a rebellious second Christine wanted to shout no, but in the mirror she caught sight of what Miss Lesley saw, her flying hair, flushed cheeks and shining eyes, and guilt overcame her.

"Of course" was what she murmured, and did not even dare turn to say goodnight to Gordon, who stood in the doorway. She knew he was watching her mockingly as she put her arm around Miss Lesley's shoulders to help her upstairs. She was angry at him for seeing her treated so childishly, angry at Miss Lesley for spoiling the fun, most of all angry at herself for being cowardly and behaving as if she'd committed a dreadful crime.

That night she could hear Miss Lesley groaning in her sleep, making pitiful little moans and sighs like a spoiled child hoping for attention. The sobs would get louder, then pause tentatively as if waiting for Christine's response, then the lights would click on and off, medicine chest doors would bang, but Christine lay obdurately in bed. Other times she would have tiptoed in, all sympathy, offering a hot toddy, nembutal, a cologne rub, a soothing chat. But tonight she felt angry and cheated, seeing her own situation

through Gordon's sardonic eyes — a grown woman submitting passively to what amounted to a public spanking. She forced herself to ignore the little moaning bids for her interest, knowing if Miss Lesley should actually call her she would not have the courage to resist. When there was no call, and even the sobs finally died away, it dawned on Christine that it was Miss Lesley who was afraid of *her*, afraid to demand for fear there would be no answer. They were equally bound, then, she thought, but it was worse for the older woman. There were a few days of pleading looks, fake migraines, with Christine weakening, sorry for the other's loneliness and indeed sorry for her own. Soon enough the mistress's dignity and confidence were restored so that she could discuss the episode kindly but firmly.

"We had had such a nice little birthday dinner, I thought," she said. "To think you would run off later to a common saloon — "

"It isn't a common saloon," Christine said. "Really, it isn't."

Miss Lesley raised a hand to silence her.

"Very well, a roadhouse. The point is that I have a certain responsible position in this community, and I would not dream of patronizing such a place. I think of you as my personal representative, Christine, and for you to be seen in the Pilot Ship was exactly as if I myself was there, and I could have died of shame."

"Gordon says it's the best place in this county," Christine said defensively.

Again Miss Lesley raised a protesting hand.

"Gordon! Our chauffeur!"

"But I've known him all my life," Christine said stubbornly.

Miss Lesley was thoughtful for a moment, and then took another tack.

"No one could be more democratic than I am," she said. "You know the liberal causes to which I give my name. You know I despise snobbery. When I asked you to make your home with me I meant just that. I didn't need another servant. My cousin John and I had simply resolved that you should have a chance to realize your superiority to the average girl. I watched you for years in the school plays, helping your mother, and like Cousin John I saw how you shone out above your surroundings. Can't you see how I hate to have you fall back?"

Christine was too embarrassed to do anything but concentrate furiously on the white stole she was knitting for her mother, and did not look up when Miss Lesley put her hand affectionately on her shoulder.

"Gordon is a good lad, but can't you see how responsible I feel about you, dear child? You're impulsive, pretty and very young. Gordon is a man. Supposing he took advantage of you. After all there was that business of the waitress last year, little Doris. You wouldn't want to be classed with her."

It was too much for Christine.

"So far as Gordon is concerned I'm not in Doris' class," she said bitterly.

"Oh, I'm not comparing you with Doris," Miss Lesley

interrupted her. "I was only shocked that after all our association you asked nothing more than to be the belle of backstairs."

"It wasn't anything like that," Christine had answered wearily. Gordon's aloofness since the Pilot Ship episode had made her regret it enough without this lecture. She knew he scorned her knuckling under to Miss Lesley, but she had an inner suspicion that he was mischievously glad to see her fall out of favor. "Gordon and I don't like each other. But when a person is young and feeling happy other people aren't chauffeurs or cooks — they're just people."

Miss Lesley sat down abruptly, breathing hard as if she had been struck.

"Tina, that's not quite fair to me," she said in a low choked voice. "You must admit I have never failed to be considerate and utterly democratic."

Christine did not reply. She was thinking that Miss Lesley was unfailingly considerate of her inferiors not because of a warm democratic heart but because to be less so would be a concession of their equality.

"I wasn't thinking that I considered Gordon beneath me, please understand, child," pleaded Miss Lesley, her eyes filling with tears. "I was thinking that he was beneath you."

"I'm sorry you were upset, Miss Lesley," Christine said quietly. She knew that Miss Lesley was unhappy at being cornered in such a snobbish stand, for all her vaunted liberalism, and was ironically amused that the lady atoned for it — at least to herself — by conscientiously raising Gordon's salary the next month. If she admired his intelligence

and capacities so much why couldn't she have made him her estate manager, or set him up in some business that would have given him independence? But no, she liked him in livery, Christine thought savagely. And Gordon himself seemed to be utterly indifferent to anything beyond that.

I could shake him, she thought. This must be his idea of spiting the world when he's only spiting himself.

The lovely dinner dresses, the pretty trinkets, were her livery, she thought, that was the joke of it. She might as well be in pastel sateens like Mrs. Duffy and the maids.

"Dear Mother," Christine wrote, then crumpled up the sheet of paper into her saucer and gulped her coffee.

She had been wandering farther and farther from her hotel each day, taking the Madeleine as her safety post at one end and the Bibliothèque Nationale as the other. It had been a mistake to try orienting herself by the big billboard advertising "100,000 Chemises," for after getting lost a few times she discovered these signs were all over Paris. She would never have been that stupid had she been with Miss Lesley, but then she wouldn't have been wandering about without destination, either. Spotting the Galeries Lafayette in the distance and the American Express across the way, she felt safe in entering a Pam Pam coffee shop on the boulevard. She had had five cups of coffee and had torn up a dozen sheets of paper in an effort to say the right thing — nothing definite that would cause her mother to alert Miss Patterson herself, but something reassuring in

case Miss Patterson tried to question her mother. She had the wire for Miss Patterson all ready in her purse, addressed care of Dr. John Lesley, Hotel Martine, Lucerne. It said, "On shopping trip in Paris for Mother. Letter follows."

She thought she might cross out "Letter follows," but using her mother as an excuse was a good idea, for Miss Lesley was always anxious to appease Mother.

"I wouldn't have her think I was trying to steal your affection from her for worlds," she frequently protested. "As I often say even when I take you away from her for months on end, she will always come first with you. You must tell her so."

Christine had never thought it necessary to make such an avowal to her mother and repeated it expecting her mother to laugh it off impatiently. Instead her mother was moved.

"How nice of her!" she declared. "You don't half appreciate her, Tina. She couldn't be nicer to me."

Christine had naïvely expected that her mother would be invited to dinners, certainly that she would feel free to visit the mansion. But when Miss Lesley suggested inviting her mother it was for two weeks from a Tuesday, and to Christine's astonishment it meant that she and her mother were served dinner alone while Miss Lesley dined in her bedroom. In spite of all Miss Lesley's protestations that Christine was no servant but a member of the family, it did not escape Christine that the procedure was the same as when the cook had her nieces to a special dinner. Mrs. Drummond saw no slight in it and, besides, her life was busy enough without nibbling at her daughter's, no matter how Christine coaxed her.

"I've got my hands full with my roomers and my preserves," her mother said blithely. "If I need anything there's your sister Jeanie and the kids up in Schenectady. And you've got all you can do looking after Miss Lesley and her family, so you can't complain of being lonesome."

"But they aren't people," Christine said. "It's like living in an endless novel. I'm not in it, I'm just the reader. First I see their pictures in the albums and hear all about them, then they drive up to visit and a new chapter begins."

"At that you'd rather be in the middle of that than in your sister Jeanie's life," her mother scoffed.

It was true.

Sister Jeanie was married to a cocky little haberdasher and harassed by three children and a thousand domestic grievances. On Christine's visits she produced groups of friends and begged Christine to tell how rich Miss Patterson was, how big was her house, how many servants, how many cars, how many diamonds.

"Isn't she lucky?" Jeanie would cry. "Poor me."

The visits always ended with Christine, in guilty embarrassment, pouring out to Jeanie the bulk of her pocketbook and suitcase. She was an outsider in the Patterson menage but now she was an outsider in her own family as well. It puzzled her to know whether it was she who had changed without realizing it or had they changed? The truth must always have been there, she decided, but it needed time to translate it. Meantime her eager visits to her mother left her more and more with an ache of disappointment. Was the gallant, gay companion of her childhood her own invention?

"'Fess up, Tina," her mother often reminded her. "If it hadn't been for me you wouldn't be sitting so pretty. Now you're glad you didn't waste those good years struggling through college when here you are, getting a wonderful education handed to you on a silver platter!"

"But don't you see it's a blind alley, Mother?" Christine had protested. "It isn't what we used to talk about, you know, it isn't the way we planned it. I'm not learning anything for myself, just how to live with rich people, how to order meals in hotels and how to look up timetables. That's not accomplishing anything."

"Not accomplishing anything!" her mother affectionately mocked her. "You, traveling all over, meeting the best people, wearing the best clothes — not tied down by a tiresome family like poor Jeanie — money in the bank! Not accomplishing anything! Why Tina Drummond, I could just shake you."

Even with such blatant evidence of the widening gap between them, the habit of counting on her mother's understanding was too deep-seated to break easily. On the day Miss Lesley informed her that John Lesley had married and was settling in Europe instead of returning to practice in New York, Christine could repress her anguish only with the thought that her mother would surely share her reaction. She bolted to the village the instant she could get away, when Cathy went to market, and rushed to her mother's house.

"I suppose Miss Lesley is upset because she'd like to have gone to the wedding," was Mrs. Drummond's first comment. "You wouldn't think he'd risk having her disinherit him, after buttering her up all these years. It must have shocked her."

"But she wasn't at all surprised, that's the strange part," Christine exclaimed. "You see we talk about him every day, about things he used to like, and we — I mean, I — plan little things for when he would come back from the war. But now it seems she's been advising him to stay all along."

Mrs. Drummond gave this some thought.

"Maybe she was afraid you'd be bored staying with her without the promise of his coming back," she suggested. "Still, I would have thought she'd want to have a hand in picking out his wife. You say she approves?"

"That's just it, Mother," Christine said excitedly, "I said what a pity it was she didn't know the girl, and do you know what she said? 'I knew her father,' she said. 'John will assist him in running his private hospital, a very good chance. They're a very fine old family, and John couldn't do better.' But why hadn't she mentioned it before, Mother? For years we've been talking about a Patterson wing for the Fairmount Hospital with him in charge someday. What made her change?"

"It does seem odd," Mrs. Drummond admitted. "But then she's fond of him. Maybe she's just glad he's settled down with a rich girl. She'll take up some other bright young relative."

"There aren't any like John!" Christine cried out so vehemently that her mother stared at her questioningly.

For a weak moment the girl had a wild impulse to fling herself in her mother's arms and sob out her despair, but how could she explain why she was so wretched when she had never admitted her hopes even to herself? She couldn't say that she had felt herself, in a vague way, a hostage left by John at his cousin's and now to be forever unclaimed. Tears rolled down her cheeks and she pressed her bare hands against her eyes.

"He was so — so kind," she murmured, chokingly.

Something in her tone made her mother look at her sharply.

"Tina, was there really something — something between you and John Lesley?" Seeing Christine's surprised look she went on, "Mr. Stoddard mentioned something once but I was so sure of you. But now you're being so upset — was there something — bad?"

"Bad?" Christine forced herself to laugh. "Oh Mother!"

"Thank goodness," her mother said. "For a minute you had me worried."

In these blundering reaches for each other Christine wondered if the bond between them had ever been real. She thought of their old way of reducing all calamities and hardships to laughter. Now she wondered if they had been laughing at the same things. She had been brought up to chuckle at the spectacle of the rich and pompous, to deplore idleness, waste, and self-indulgence. It was baffling to find that as soon as her connection with the Patterson money and prestige brought them in close range her mother's ridicule switched to reverence. What were we

laughing at then all those years? Christine puzzled. They laughed when they rose at dawn to do the washing, they laughed when they stayed up all night putting up fruit and vegetables, they laughed when they made over old clothes for Jeanie, they laughed because they worked hard but were "getting by," as her mother said, and they laughed most because they had each other at the time they needed each other.

Maybe it was the fifty dollars a month Christine now gave her mother — evidence that she no longer needed her. Maybe it was the disconcerting hint that her mother no longer needed *her*. There were times Christine's conscience would smite her for letting Miss Lesley's affairs force her to neglect her mother. Loaded with gifts and bursting with confidences she drove down to her mother's house, beaming in anticipation of the pleasure she was bringing, only to find that Mrs. Drummond was away. The high school science teacher, who had a room there, said she was visiting Jeanie in Schenectady, something her mother never used to do without discussing it with Christine first. Another time she had been at the hospital seeing Mr. Stoddard, who was ill, and when she returned she had been so full of Mr. Stoddard's troubles that she paid scant attention to Christine. It was unreasonable to feel hurt, the girl was obliged to admit, just because her mother's life should be filled without her; it must be the way any child felt discovering that it was not the whole world to the parent. At least she need not feel remorseful, then, for neglecting her mother, Christine consoled herself, but her

own habit of tender dependence continued fitfully. She thought of herself as a child clutching for her mother's hand and having her fingers firmly pushed away each time to remind her that she was a big girl now and must learn to walk alone.

It was utterly childish of her, Christine knew, to keep nursing the hurt of her last meeting with her mother. It was when Miss Lesley had told her of her plan to go abroad for perhaps a year, that the idea had come to Christine of breaking away and beginning a life of her own, perhaps in New York.

"Now is my chance to get out on my own," she told her mother. "She won't need me now, for she can get a regular nurse as her traveling companion. I'll come back home and get ready to tackle a job in New York — really get started at last. This way, it won't be such a break."

"But what makes you think you could get that soft a job in New York, Christine?" her mother said. "Why should you pass on such a nice spot to some nurse? And honey, you know you wouldn't be happy back in my poor little house after all that grandeur. The village will think you've done something to get fired, too."

There was no use. Her mother was not in Fairmount to say goodbye when they finally sailed, but sent a wire to the boat congratulating her on her good luck. It did not seem to bother her that it might be a whole year before they saw each other again, and Christine felt cast off. Under these circumstances it was hard to write naturally to her mother, and certainly she couldn't confide her present situation.

It had been her mother, in fact, who had given away her address the first time she had deserted Miss Patterson. "Please forgive Tina, she's young," Mrs. Drummond had telephoned Miss Lesley, unable to believe that her daughter's leaving had been voluntary. "If you'll take her back, she'll do better, I promise you. You'll find her at the Y.W.C.A. on Lexington Avenue." No, there was no use expecting support from her mother. If Miss Lesley should get suspicious too soon and get in touch with Mrs. Drummond, Christine could imagine well enough what would happen.

"She said you had asked her to do some shopping in Paris for you," Christine could imagine Miss Lesley saying over the transatlantic phone.

"Ridiculous!" Mrs. Drummond would cry. "I never asked her to do such a thing. You must get someone to look for her."

There would be detectives, again — and no sooner had Christine thought of them than she was aware that she was being stared at by the only other customer in the Pam Pam, a dark, bearded, duffel-coated man, with piercing black eyes behind black-rimmed glasses, so resolutely French in appearance that she deduced at once he must be an American. He was peering at her over the top of his *Le Monde* and she thought he was staring at her saucerful of torn notes as if he suspected them of being secret code papers. She shook off her apprehensions about him and set to work again on a note that would stave off her mother's suspicions. Finally she wrote "Dear Mother,

Miss Lesley has left me to do some errands in Paris while she confers with Cousin John in Switzerland. Don't write again, as I am returning soon."

Even if the two women did get suspicious and contacted each other it would take time and by that time she would have her plans made. She wished she dared ask her mother to cable her a thousand dollars from the Fairmount Savings Bank, but such a request would certainly tip off her mother that something was amiss between her and Miss Lesley.

She paid her check and walked across the boulevard to the American Express office. She had planned to give it out boldly as her address, but the nearer she got to it the more she realized it would bring on the bloodhounds. No, she could not even have her own address, but must either be "care of Miss Lesley Patterson," or nowhere.

There were groups of Americans chattering in groups around the door and she felt at once as shy and out of place as she always did among her contemporary countrymen, either at home or abroad. These casually dressed females of all ages might as well have belonged to a different planet for all she knew of them. Even when their clothes were shabby their manner was assured, superior, independent: they knew what they wanted and where they were going. *They* never lost themselves in other people's lives; *they* didn't wonder how they could find themselves; they *were* themselves. They frightened her, these countrymen of hers in groups, striding about the world with cameras and little address books, smiling like airplane hostesses, cool, impersonal, competent smiles, making your own

panic all the worse. They frightened her at home, even in Fairmount Village, from the time she realized how differently other families lived in contrast to her own. In high school the girls ran around in men's shirts and rolled-up jeans; they went on hikes up the mountains with boys, stopping at Youth Hostels, singing hill-billy songs. Crammed in ancient jeeps they sputtered up and down the village streets. They had violent friendships, steady dates, passionate loyalties. Sometimes Christine would be drawn, fascinated, into the fringes of this world, but before she could even sample it some chance word from her mother would make it seem distasteful.

"Christine's too intelligent for the young people of this town," her mother would boast to everyone who questioned her isolation. "As for beaux, she finds out how silly they are after a couple of dates and we have a good laugh together."

The fact was that there was never a friendship or courtship started that wasn't neatly nipped in the bud by Mrs. Drummond's amused comments. A crush on the football coach could be dispelled by her mother's gay imitation of his swagger down Main Street. A plan for a barbecue in the back yard for her classmates would dissolve at Mrs. Drummond's argument that if they couldn't afford a proper indoor party with music and favors then don't have any at all. It was consoling to be considered superior to her contemporaries and to her mother's as well. It was flattering to be worthy of responsibilities, to be indeed indispensable to her mother in looking after little Jeanie, or making the

chutney they sold to the supermarket, especially since these chores were always accompanied by talk of Christine's future. One thing her mother insisted, that Christine was not to be a slave as she herself had been all her life. She would go out in the world and be somebody.

"But you need me here till Jeanie is grown up," Christine reminded her. "Somebody has to help you, Mother."

"You can help by being successful outside," her mother said. "I'm not going to hold you back on Jeanie's or my account. You just be planning what you want to be and I'm right here behind you."

She would be a journalist, perhaps a foreign correspondent, Christine would declare after reporting high praise from her English teacher. But her mother shuddered at this reminder of Christine's father, a good-for-nothing journalist she had divorced years ago.

"Why not a playwright?" her mother urged, and Christine happily raised her sights to the higher ambition, until a prize in music made her switch to that field. She would study at the Conservatory and be a music teacher.

"Music teacher?" her mother exclaimed. "Be a concert pianist."

Her dreams changed, no matter what they were, for her mother always lifted them to something higher; there was nothing that her little Christine could not accomplish. Scrubbing the floors, washing and ironing, painting and mending the furniture, all these chores were done to the sweet dreams of future glory. Even the "nice" girls in high school were frowned upon as friends by her mother,

for Christine's place, she said, was with the boarding-school girls in the schools on the river, or with the debutantes who spent summers at the nearby lake clubhouse. Somehow her mother's impossible yearnings for her made anything less seem wrong, and Christine was ashamed to catch herself wishing sometimes for nothing more than an invitation to any dance or any beau with a car.

The invitation to the Patterson home was a perfect compromise between her mother's ideals and her own. Her mother often spoke of the splendor of the old mansions up the mountains, sighing that these were the proper backgrounds for a girl like Christine. But most of them had been boarded up for years or taken over as resthomes and boardinghouses. Only the Patterson family continued to maintain theirs, making adjustments to the times and the diminishing family, but keeping up something of a show to the satisfaction of the admiring villagers far below. When old General Patterson died in the Thirties, leaving his spinster daughter, Lesley, no one was surprised to see changes made in the old place. Stables and kennels were abandoned, dairy and other buildings boarded up, formal gardens buried in weeds and broken statuary, half the house shut up and the staff cut down to minimum. But what did surprise everyone was the slow emergence of Lesley Patterson from her lifetime of semi-invalid retirement. Some said Lesley, or Miss Lesley as she was called, had kept in the background all these years because she was really sickly, others claimed she was neurotically shy be-

cause she knew she was "funny-looking." She was not ugly; there was merely a puzzling lack of harmony in the way she was assembled. Her square shoulders and doggedly soldierly carriage were at war with the dark, anxious, pleading eyes; her square chin and strong nose, the Patterson nose, had no relation to the tremulous little mouth; her muscular arms and legs were too short, her head too big, her manner as apologetic and appeasing as it was stubborn.

"She looks like the Duchess in *Alice*," Christine used to say.

The death of her father seemed to release Miss Lesley from a wicked spell. Overshadowed and overwhelmed by him all her life, it was then that she began to burgeon with the awareness of her new power and to take on all the dictatorial qualities. At last she would establish herself as a person in her own right. She had no desire to operate on the grand scale of her father's day but she was resolved to bring back, within reason, the prestige of the Patterson name in the county. Architects called in for modernizing the rococo mansion compromised by tearing down one florid wing, nipping off some cupolas and adding a glass wing. This modern touch turned out only to intensify the Gothic feeling, for the surrounding bleak crags and pine-decked mountains filled the windows, the strip of Hudson visible far, far below, seemed part of an old melodrama backdrop, the ships and other craft were tiny toys operated by an electric button on the mistress's desk, none of them as large as the model warship in the window. Once the physical aspects of the place had been "improved," Miss

Lesley felt free to open her home to all the distant relatives and friends who used to visit there. In the old days these visitors had felt much more at home there than had the shy, stammering daughter of the house who cowered in her room with her companion or stayed out near the kennels playing with the dogs. It gratified her new sense of power to show these people that she was, after all, her father's daughter and no longer to be regarded as a nonentity.

It was John Lesley, Lesley Patterson's cousin from Louisiana, who had made the connection between Christine and the Patterson menage. He had come north to study medicine in the Albany Medical School and on a visit to his cousin had been so taken with Fairmount that he had decided to serve his internship at the big county hospital there where one of his teachers was chief. He rented a room from Mrs. Drummond because her cottage was nearby, and visiting consultants found it more convenient than the town hotel or Wharf Club. He was a gay, intelligent young man, too busy to have time for making local friends, and homesick enough to enjoy being part of the Drummond home life, dancing to the radio or playing gin rummy with Christine, helping her or little Jeanie with their school work. They were flattered that he should prefer their company to that of his cousin, but he wryly explained that visiting a morgue was no novelty to him, and that he worked too hard to spend his few free hours doing his duty by his family. His independence and indifference to the advantages of her sponsorship acted like catnip to Miss Lesley,

accustomed to fawners, and she must have spent months studying ways of conquering this problem. Inviting him to meet village bigwigs or elderly politician friends of her father who could throw future politically controlled posts his way, marshaling a family reunion, none of these inducements attracted the young man to the dismal château up the hill. It was her personal appeal for his advice in reorganizing her lonely life that finally won him, for he was a warm, compassionate young man.

"We're both orphans," Miss Lesley had written him, "though I'm almost old enough to be your mother. I've lived such a stuffy, boring life and now I'm free to enjoy things, but I don't know how to begin. Won't you help?"

And so John began spending more and more time at the big house, being his cousin's "social engineer," he gaily explained to the Drummonds, practicing bargain-counter psychotherapy which was bound to come in handy later on when he wanted to inveigle rich old invalids to buy him a hospital of his own. He said mockingly that a young doctor learned by looking after the sick, but he *lived* by looking after the hypochondriacs, and it was about time he picked up the knack.

To Christine John Lesley symbolized everything she had dreamed of in a man of the world, and she began to look upon her high school beaux with her grown-up hero's mocking detachment. She hurried home from school to clean his neckties surreptitiously, even to shine his shoes. She would rather stay home at night after her chores were done, pretending to study on the chance he would come in,

than go to the movies with some callow classmate. Mrs. Drummond herself was much taken with his Southern folksiness and wry realism, akin to her own, and she approved his controlling effect on her daughter's high spirits. She considered it a great honor that he should recommend that Christine help out Miss Lesley at the parties he was now persuading his cousin to give. Youth and beauty on the premises was what the old place needed, he declared, and not architectural reconstruction. Actually he thought that Christine's spontaneous delight in everything strange or new would cancel his own boredom, which it did. Miss Lesley, on her part, was pleased at the suggestion as a means of bridging the gulf to the town people, and her "great-house ego," as John called it, was gratified that the child would profit by this contact, being, as he said, too good for her own background.

Eagerly Christine pedaled her bicycle the eight miles uphill on the wonderful afternoons she was summoned, and was ever dazzled by the royal magnificence of the place. It bewildered her that John Lesley should refer to it as the Eyesore. It astonished her that Miss Lesley should offer sympathy for obliging her to bicycle so far.

"But it's a wonderful English bicycle, Miss Lesley," she explained happily. "It took me all last summer working at the supermarket to buy it. Do you know, it only takes me twenty minutes to ride home? Mostly coasting, you see."

But Miss Lesley began sending the car for her after that conversation. In no time at all the very thought of pedaling up the hills seemed so impossible that she ended up by

giving Jeanie the wheel. At sixteen it was a lark to wear the Austrian peasant costume Miss Lesley gave to her, and be petted and admired as she passed the delicacies or played accompaniments for their singing. Most fun was to have John Lesley wink at her as she passed, and treat her as a fellow conspirator, whispering malicious comments about the other guests. Then came the moment of departure when Miss Lesley gratefully kissed her. She was given an armful of flowers, a box of cakes, a new charm for her bracelet, a five-dollar bill in a box of handkerchiefs, and triumphally escorted home in the Cadillac.

"Who was there and what did they talk about?" her mother always eagerly asked. "What did the women wear?"

There were not many young people at these gatherings, no matter how hard John Lesley tried to ensnare them. It was his fault, he mourned, for being so engrossed in his medical studies all his years up North that he had not made the most of his Albany social contacts. He corraled occasional young doctors or students with their debutante sisters or fiancées but, as he confided to Christine, it was disastrously dull for them to drive all the way up from Albany expecting a marvellous country party and instead finding themselves overwhelmed by a stolid family reunion.

The Patterson connections had always been respectable, substantial citizens; if they were artists they did portraits; if they were literary they confided themselves to decent biographies of the decent dead or travel books; if they were wayward they gracefully absented themselves for residence in Paris or Rome. Cousin Lesley laughingly deplored this situation and had seemed gratefully enthusiastic over John's attempt to inject smartness and youth into her circle. He was baffled (considering her appeal to him) by her illogical way of burying them under an ever-increasing horde of pseudo-Lesleys and Pattersons. Finally he realized that Cousin Lesley was mortally afraid of the smart world which might laugh at her or, worse yet, not recognize the infallibility of the family name. So she must bolster herself with relatives or anointed ones whose ancestors had been privileged to serve the family as lawyers, doctors, brokers or bankers.

Christine was impressed by the way a family could be so completely confident of being the center of the universe. In the library were photographs of every crowned head, celebrated actress, tycoon, president, admiral, senator, as if they were all Pattersons by osmosis. Here was Edward VII at Carlsbad at the very time (no doubt deliberately) that Uncle Barrett was there; here was Eleonora Duse in the play that Grandmother Lesley had graciously deigned to see in Rome; here was Clemençeau in the parade which Grandfather Patterson had generously watched; here was the Czarina with her firstborn, who had the good fortune to have the same birthday as Uncle Tremont; here was the last Pope pictured on the very day he had been honored by an audience with Great-Uncle Lesley. Christine was surprised that young John Lesley found this monumental complacency a huge joke, and when it finally dawned on him that Cousin Lesley's protests of rebellion were only

verbal, it was too late for him to give up his involvement in her life. He continued producing advice when she anxiously implored him, quite aware by this time that her plans were already fixed and this was her devious method for insuring his attendance on her. She was as deeply concerned about his career as he was, and though his good sense warned him that her interest could become uncomfortably possessive he found himself warmed by her devotion and intelligent grasp of his problems. There were difficult choices and sacrifices a young doctor must make, and no one could discuss them with him more wisely than Lesley Patterson. The town said Miss Lesley was being a mother to him but John found her more like a father or a doting bachelor uncle. Meantime he was getting used to pleasant little surprises of checks in the mail, credit cards at shops and clubs, and the use of the new Lincoln — just to get mileage on it, she explained.

The Drummonds were flattered that the young man should keep his room at their house, in spite of Miss Lesley's standing invitation for him to make his home with her. He was astute enough to hold out against this offer, though he spent more and more time there. Christine loved being in on two sides of his life, and was inspired to do volunteer nursing at the hospital three nights a week, just to glimpse yet another side of him, but she gave this up, since Miss Lesley was sending for her more often to read aloud to her or play duets.

Mrs. Drummond was elated at the turn of events.

"Don't talk about it at school," she cautioned. "It will

make the other girls jealous and they may try to get the work."

She need not have worried. The other girls knew all about it and were far from being jealous. The little daughters of the village grocers, plumbers, laundrymen and bakers were curious and a little pitying, reflecting their parents' attitude toward lives that were different from their own.

"My mother wouldn't let me go out and work for people," they told Christine. "She'd be ashamed."

"You see what I mean? Jealous!" her mother said when Christine told her this and they both chuckled.

Christine didn't care how anyone felt since she was happy in the added link with her hero. But the girls had put in her head a faint query as to why her own mother, who had such immense pride in her abilities, should consider an honor something that other mothers regarded as a humiliation. Her mother was smarter, that was all, she decided sensibly. The village mothers had no greater ambition for their daughters than that they should have husbands and their own homes, but *her* mother thought her Tina could achieve anything on earth — be a greater actress than Katharine Cornell (see her in the high school plays), be a Schiaparelli (see the clever dresses she designed), be a concert pianist (listen to her play the piano in the school orchestra).

Later, whenever she thought back on her childhood it was to remember all the fine planning for the future and hardly ever of the actual chores she shared with her mother.

She must have served as a kind of oracle for her mother, too, turning out sage bits of advice on any problem as if she really knew the answers, instead of being so attuned to her mother's mind that the words were really her mother's though the voice was hers. In the same way she came to see that she had read her own meanings into her mother's promises, and did not feel betrayed at first, only puzzled. When she was making her excited plans for business college her mother had protested that the school she had chosen was not good enough, perhaps she would do better to stay home a year, saving up for a better school. She assumed that her mother felt a secretary's career was not up to her capabilities, so she started making plans for the university. In her eager, excited preparations, working nights in the telephone exchange for extra money, getting her clothes ready, selecting her courses from the catalogue, Christine did not notice her mother's silences.

One day, a fortnight before she was to leave for college, she was in the back yard in her bathing suit hanging up sheets when the Patterson limousine drew up at the gate. Instead of Miss Lesley calling to her from the car as she usually did when she needed her, Christine saw that the lady was carefully picking her way up the cobblestone path, a dachshund at her heels. Arrayed in town tweeds, mannish felt hat set squarely atop her gray close-cropped hair, walking stick firmly in hand, the call must be a social one, or perhaps she was bringing some wonderful going-away present for Christine. Mrs. Drummond was sitting on the front porch husking sweet corn and rose to greet the caller and then beckoned Christine.

"Miss Lesley wants to talk to you," she called out.

Miss Lesley sat on the wicker swing, smiling as Christine dashed up.

"Just like a bathing beauty, isn't she, Mrs. Drummond? What a beautiful magazine cover that would make — the green suit and the red hair!"

It must be she was bringing a gift. Maybe fifty dollars, maybe a hundred, Christine thought hopefully, that would make over eleven hundred in the bank. So busy was she with her fantasies that Miss Lesley's proposition came to her as from a great distance and at first seemed to have nothing to do with money. For a little while, once that disappointment was over, the conversation seemed to have nothing to do with her at all. Miss Lesley spoke of the nurse-companion she had had for years who had recently left her, a stolid German always in a stiff white nurse's uniform, occasionally seen on the road with the dachshunds. Miss Lesley said that although she missed the Fräulein, her health was so much improved she no longer needed a trained nurse, and in fact would like a younger person in the household, a "happier personality" who could "undumpish" her, as Queen Victoria used to say. Nodding politely, Christine suddenly was thunderstruck to hear Miss Lesley's voice going on to say that she was offering this post to her. She would live at the big house, travel with Miss Lesley, and receive a hundred and fifty dollars a month with all expenses. Christine felt her color rising and an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of her stomach. She was sure her mother was feeling the same way, and waited for her to speak but she did not.

"I've never traveled, Miss Lesley," she gulped. "I don't see how I could be of any help to you at all."

Miss Lesley laughed indulgently, a signal for her dachshund to leap up on her lap.

"All the more beneficial for me," she said. "I'd see the old places with new eyes, and enjoy them all the more as your guide. You'll soon learn. Then there's your music. My father used to say a gifted amateur gave him more pleasure than a professional musician. Christine can accompany any of my musical friends, and to tell the truth I look forward to duets. I'm sure it will cure me of whatever ails me."

"Christine can cure anybody's depression," her mother said proudly. "She has a wonderful touch for headaches, too."

"But you see I'm going to Cornell next month," Christine blurted out. "Didn't Dr. Lesley tell you?"

"He did," her mother told her. "Miss Lesley wanted to make your offer so you could choose."

"But I have—" Christine looked appealingly at her mother, but her mother looked down at her basket of corn. There was nothing to do but stammer her thanks for the offer and regrets that her plans were already made. Miss Lesley continued to stroke her dog, smiling, and then put him down on the ground.

"Take your time to think, my dear," she said. "I wanted to put the idea in your head, that was all."

Rudolph, the dachshund, was nosing Christine's ankles and she bent down to stroke him.

"We saw Rudy's wife and her two new puppies down at Dr. MacNeil's," she said, eager to change the subject.

"Poor little Gretel," said Miss Lesley rising. "Cousin John suggested a christening party when they come back from the vet's tomorrow afternoon. Do come, both of you, and we'll choose names for them."

Christine and her mother laughed.

"Christine named the puppies already," explained Mrs. Drummond. "Salami and Frank."

"Wonderful," agreed Miss Lesley. Her eyes went from mother to daughter, wistfully. "You two do have so much fun together. Sometimes when I'm waiting out in the car I hear you laughing and I wonder what it would be like to have someone to laugh with."

Christine picked up Rudy in her arms, mumbling some endearment to cover her embarrassment as she walked down to the gate with the visitor. Poor, lonely woman, she thought, and not "funny-looking" at all the way people said. Sweet and forlorn-looking, maybe, and something a little strange.

"Oh Miss Patterson, I'm so sorry!" she burst out impetuously as the chauffeur opened the car door.

The lady seated herself and took Rudy from Christine's arms. She didn't speak for a moment and when she did her voice shook.

"It was just a mad hope, that's all," she said, trying to smile. "I had a crazy idea it might not be too late to start having fun out of life, and it seemed to me you had the secret. I had no right to try to steal it. Never mind, child,

we'll forget all about it. But be sure to come to the christening party tomorrow."

There were tears in her eyes, Christine noted, stricken with remorse. For a split second she had a childish impulse to shout after the car, "Don't be unhappy, please. I'll come and play with you, I'll play any game you like."

I'm the first toy she couldn't have, she reflected, turning back slowly to the house. To her mother she exclaimed, "How awful for her to have counted so much on me. But Mother, can you really see me in that stiff white dress, my hair in a bun, marching those dachshunds back and forth the rest of my life?"

Her mother didn't laugh.

"She doesn't want you to take the nurse's place," she said. "I thought you always wanted to travel."

"Yes, but — "

Christine looked quickly at her mother, surprised their reactions had, for the first time, been different.

"This way you wouldn't have to go to college," her mother said. Then, conscious of the bewilderment in her daughter's eyes, she added defensively, "Instead of taking money out of the bank you'd be putting it in. A hundred and fifty clear every month. Not many girls your age can do that. If it had happened to me . . . "

Christine didn't want to pursue the problem. She had a stunned sense of having been let down hard, a dim suspicion that her mother must have been pretending with her all these years, the way you pacify a child to keep it quiet. Her eyes unwillingly opened, she began to see little

things that forced upon her a new picture of her mother. The revelation was destructive, for if her mother had not really believed in her how could she believe in herself? The great ideas for the future had been her mother's creation, but now her mother would settle for the first compromise — and instead of declaring that her daughter was too good for this dead end she pronounced it a stroke of luck, as if the child could never have done anything better. Christine felt scared and inadequate to follow her plans without her mother's valiant support; she puzzled over why her mother had lost faith in her. She decided to talk it over with John Lesley.

By this time she knew she was in love with him, and he must have guessed it, for an eighteen-year-old girl's adoration is not easily hidden, at least from a self-confident young male. But he disappointed her by taking her problem casually.

"I can't see why a girl like you wants to go to college," he said. "Like tying up a wild pony."

"But it's what I've been planning for years," she said, not to be teased out of her earnest mood. "I don't want to be a tame pony, either, tied up in Fairmount all my life. I want to study and be ready to go out in the world."

"The big world!" he mocked, tweaking her nose. Then seeing that she was piqued he said, "Look here what do you suppose I'm going to do if you leave Fairmount? I'm stuck here for another year, and what with the dull town and my dear cousin's deadly parties I couldn't stand it if it wasn't for you skipping around the landscape like a pert little doe.

Who would I have to laugh with? Yet here you want to leave me in the lurch all alone."

"But you would be leaving next year yourself," she reminded him, flushed at his flattery. "You'd be leaving *me* in the lurch."

"Me? Leave you in the lurch?" He ran his hand through his curly black hair, laughing, as if the ways of women were beyond him. "After the way I've been looking out for you ever since I got here? Who is it chases off the bad boys that try to pester you?"

"They do?" Christine's eyes opened in amazement.

"I'm the watchdog around this place," he said. "Somebody's got to see that that saucy little strut of yours doesn't get you in trouble. If you stayed with Lesley you'd be safe as in a convent. That's why I put the idea in her head."

"You did?" Christine was astonished.

"I told you I couldn't stand the old morgue up there without little old Tina lighting it up, didn't I?" he said. "That was just one reason. The other was so Lesley could look after you. You help me out by standing by old Lesley, and Lesley helps me by looking after you."

He smiled down at her puzzled face, one of his winning, conspiratorial smiles.

"Stick around a while, old pal," he coaxed and tweaked her chin affectionately.

So now there were two people she loved who for some puzzling hidden reasons were making it hard for her to do what she wanted to do. Now she could no longer discuss

her plans with her mother, knowing her mother wanted her to take the Patterson job. Even Jeanie, dull, doting little sister, did not understand why anyone should want to go to school if she could quit it by marrying, as she was already planning to do. Christine went about preparing her clothes and painting her bedroom for a new roomer, with only the barest support from her mother. They talked about immediate small matters and avoided issues. Her mother's tacit opposition hurt her, but Christine would have gone ahead regardless had it not been for the odd thing about her money.

For years she had been saving whatever pinmoney she earned, and it had been a proud moment indeed when she was promoted from piggy banks to her mother's First National Bank account. She had a dim notion that the money was in her own name, not understanding these matters, and it was only in the last few weeks she found it was in her mother's name. Even that did not perturb her. It did not strike her as anything but caution for her mother to postpone taking out her funds, telling her that cash on hand might be wasted and there was plenty of time to pay her college entrance fees. Then came the deadline date for payment. Christine was impatiently reminding her mother they must get to the bank that day, but it was always hard to get full attention from the busy woman when she was polishing her copper kettles and on this day they were doing a thorough job of it. If she hadn't been so absorbed she might have seen her mother's face and guessed something was amiss, for with both of them color was a

complete giveaway — a quick rose flush in the cheeks over sudden pleasure, a slow rise of deeper red in the throat in embarrassment or shame, and the sudden draining of blood to gardenia white in shock or grief. Mrs. Drummond's throat was crimson on this occasion.

"I'm afraid we'll just have to wait," she said, then turned the hot water on in the dishpan so that her words, remarkable as they turned out to be, were toned down by the everyday matter-of-fact sloshing of suds.

"You see, Tina," she said, "I don't think I ever told you that Mr. Stoddard has tried to help us out for a great many years by making little investments that bring in a few extra dollars. A while back he told me of this stock he was putting his own money in and was good enough to loan me something to invest, too. Then, absolutely for no reason, it began to drop and we had to keep covering. Mr. Stoddard had spent all his spare cash and had been so good about the loan to me — to us — well, I knew you'd want me to do it if you understood, so I used your money along with mine to cover for us. There's still almost a hundred in the bank, Tina, if you want to take that while we wait for the stock to come up again, the way Mr. Stoddard says it's bound to do. It's still listed, I mean, it isn't as if you didn't have something to show for your money."

Numb, Christine went on rubbing the copper pot, waiting for the sense of her mother's words to sink in. She had to have three hundred at the outset. Her mother knew that.

"I don't see why — " she started to say but her throat

was dried of words and even her chest ached with breathing. She didn't dare look at her mother, conscious of the dismay on her own face, but kept her eyes on her mother's hands, pretty, long, slender hands, nervously swishing the cloth around the pans, wringing it out, then rubbing hand cream into her palms, pushing back the cuticle carefully as if nothing was more important than keeping hands from betraying their hard work. Then she was overcome with a wave of pity for her mother, who must surely be stricken with hideous remorse at disappointing her Tina, and the pretty hands seemed a gallant banner flown against misfortune, a brave pose against circumstances that would have crushed a lesser spirit. Look, the hands said, I may seem a hard-working drudge, raising my little family all alone, but actually I am a spoiled, charming beauty with no care but keeping hands fit to wear emeralds. Christine flung her arms about her.

"Don't feel badly, Mother," she cried. "You did just right. I'll be all right. I'll go to Miss Lesley's and save up another year and then — "

Mrs. Drummond dashed tears from her eyes and patted Christine gently. It was Christine who felt guilty and ashamed and her mother who had to do the consoling.

"Tina, angel, I knew you'd understand," she said. "You knew I couldn't leave Mr. Stoddard holding the bag after the way he's always stood by us. It will be for the best, you wait and see. You'll learn a lot of things in a family like that more important than school, and just think, all that money coming in, all clear. You'll be glad you waited another year.

"Many's the time I don't know where we would have been if Mr. Stoddard hadn't stepped in and saved the day," her mother went on. "I know you're glad we could help him out of a tight spot."

Indeed she was glad, Christine reassured her, and what was college anyway compared to gratitude? She was intent on hiding her dismay, repeating that it was all for the best, and the money didn't matter to her, until she realized that there was no need to assuage her mother's conscience. Mrs. Drummond seemed comfortably certain that she had done nothing more than postpone a childish picnic that had interfered with really important adult plans. Christine was embarrassed at her own selfishness in believing her own plans had been as vital to her mother as they were to herself. When she finally went up to bed she was so tense from the effort to disguise her grief that she could bear it no longer and buried her head in the pillow for silent weeping. On the other side of the bed Jeanie stirred restlessly. Christine tried to stop sniffling, then crept out of bed into the hall, balling a handkerchief in her mouth to keep back the sobs.

Down the hall John Lesley's door opened and he stood there in his pajamas peering out. The street lamp shone through the window upon her, crouching in the corner of the hall.

"Tina!" he whispered. "What in the world is wrong?"

The next minute she had flung herself in his arms, weeping on his shoulder. He drew her inside and closed the door.

"Tell me," he said and gently put his bathrobe around her.

The tenderness in his voice made her sob all the more, clinging to him while he stroked her hair and murmured soothing words. After a while she chokingly blurted out part of her grief, clinging to this one friend as she would like to have done, it seemed to her, forever. But presently he quietly disentangled her arms and led her back to her own room. He brushed her lips with his briefly, and when her arms flew out again toward him he pressed her hands against his cheek and dropped them.

Both of them knew that she would gladly have given him anything he wished that night, and on Christine his rejection left a curious mark. From that night on whenever hot desire stormed for fulfillment the memory of the rebuff imposed a rigid prohibition, a kind of fierce fidelity that made her freeze at the crucial point of surrender. Her body belonged to John Lesley, she felt, whether he accepted it or not.

This armor was fine for a warm, impulsive young woman and perhaps she should have been grateful to him for it in her dealings with other men. Instead her heart never really forgave him for his chivalrous regard for her honor. In lonely hours she fervently wished she had some wild folly to remember. She felt the more bound to him in being sure that he wished so, too.

Christine had been standing at the D window of the American Express post office without knowing exactly

what she would do when it came her turn. She heard the clerk ask "Edna Darrow or Ada Lou Darrow?" of the girl ahead of her and realized she would have to decide in another minute whether to use her own name or make up another one. Better make the plunge and start being this fine independent Christine Drummond before she weakened. Miss Patterson couldn't start the pursuit for another week or two.

She gave her name but no address. She did not sign the address books, either, but leafed them over curiously. People were sloshing in from the streets in wet raincoats or with newspapers over their heads and Christine remembered regretfully the beautiful purple tweed raincoat and umbrella hanging in her closet at the villa. It rained every day in the Paris winters, she thought, and that meant she'd have to outfit herself all over. She hadn't thought about expenses for years and it surprised her that once you've known the fear of poverty it can no more be forgotten than bicycle-riding. Maybe she should have packed a trunk, after all, but she'd argued that out with herself before.

She wandered around the office, waiting for the shower to let up. There were dozens of unclaimed letters on the walls and she studied them with faint apprehension, as a new prospector would examine the bleached bones of his predecessors. There were three letters for one Mildred Casey, all from Port Jervis, New York. Christine felt a pang of recognition, for this was almost home. What had happened to this lost girl? The handwriting was the round undistinguished lettering that characterized small-town

public schools of earlier in the century. Pleas, Christine thought, from a humble parent this wandering Mildred would rather forget. Had Mildred gone on to better things, or was she lost and forgotten forever? Would there be unclaimed letters for Christine Drummond someday when she too was lost in nowhere? The thought, popping out from the back of her mind, startled her, revealing to her how frightened and helpless she really felt. How could she have regarded herself as an indispensable aid, when all she had done was to transmit Miss Lesley's decisions for so long they seemed her own. Even deciding on a menu without Miss Lesley's preferences in mind was an unforeseen puzzle. What did she like, and what could she afford? There was so much more to learn than she had dreamed. So much to be unlearned, too, and this she could not face, those humiliating little intimations, for instance, that perhaps it was she who had been the dependent one and that if she hadn't run out blindly when she had she would have been her own slave for ever.

"There must be a hundred Mildred Caseys wandering over Europe," observed a man's voice beside her. "I'll bet the real Mildred has her own good reason for passing up these letters."

Christine did not look up at the speaker but moved on, commanding a severe expression. In the next second she was furious with herself. She was reacting in exactly the maddening way Miss Lesley did. What was the harm of being friendly with strangers? she had always gaily argued. What was the point of travel if you didn't want new faces?

"You're so right, Tina," Miss Lesley had acknowledged with a sigh. "You teach me so much, so many basic things. I don't know how I ever managed without you. I always thought I was just being abnormally shy, but you make me realize my fear of intrusion is just being suspicious and unfriendly."

It was Miss Lesley who had slyly been doing the teaching, Christine thought, defeated; for here she was, the jaunty defender of strangers, drawing away haughtily from this young man's simple approach, as if her womanly virtue had been insulted. Next she would be calling for the manager, complaining that she had been annoyed in the exclusive chambers of the American Express by the insolence of a nonmember. It was too ridiculous, and she vowed to shake off Miss Lesley's shadow and welcome the very next stranger with open arms.

The rain was driving more and more visitors into the shelter of the office. She wondered if it would ever let up long enough for her to get back to the hotel with her suit undamaged. She stared absently at the Mildred Casey letters posted on the wall and heard the stranger chuckling beside her.

"I see that the case of the lost Miss Casey really bothers you," he said. He was the bright-eyed young man from the Pam Pam, his inquisitive black eyes digging into her face, measuring his welcome. "It needn't."

"Why not?" Christine asked politely. "Do you know her?"

"Millions of Mildreds," he laughed softly. "I know one

thing, that wherever she is she's glad she's not in Port Jervis. She'd rather be in that opium den in Port Said than in the old chromium candy kitchen back in Port Jervis. Wouldn't you?"

Christine did not answer. Her eye was caught by another letter on the wall. It was a gold-speckled envelope and the handwriting, in azure-blue ink, was arrogantly feminine, lacy and aristocratic. The postmark was London, the date last July, and Christine's confused brain took in that it was addressed to none other than Gordon MacNeil. Instinctively Christine reached out for it and the stranger laughed.

"I see you don't care what happens to your Mildred Caseys but this Gordon MacNeil vanishing is another matter."

"But he didn't vanish," Christine said. "I know where he is."

"Give the clerk his address and perhaps they'll notify him," he said.

Christine hesitated. After her initial surprise that Gordon should have a female correspondent in London, she recalled that he had gone over ahead of them in April to have the new car ready for the tour through Wales and Ireland. No reason why there should not be women in his life, for his surly masculinity challenged them, but he kept that side of his life discreetly hidden. She was ashamed that this London letter, with its hint of secret romance, should excite her curiosity. Poor Gordon, she thought, stuck in his prison, while adventure perhaps waited for him in this unclaimed letter.

"Sometimes people don't want their letters," said the young man.

"He's in a very dull place so I think he will want it," Christine said and walked up to the nearest desk to give Gordon's address at the Lucerne hotel, mailing her own letter at the same time. The young man, attached to her side, was helpful with the red tape at the desk, but she wished he would go away. It was a real effort to maintain the casual friendliness of the democratic young person she pictured herself to be when all of her new reactions were as hostile as those of Lesley Patterson. She heard *Definitely-not-top-drawer-you-can-tell-by-the-shoes* as clearly as if Lesley had whispered it and her involuntary drawing back as if the touch of a common stranger was dangerous forced her to smile determinedly at him. He kept staring at her with no attempt at disguising his interest. He carried some letters in his hand which he stuffed in his pocket.

"Cigarette?" he offered and she felt obliged to accept, feeling too that the flare of his lighter was a Mephistophelian sign that she had accepted more than a cigarette.

Around them their countrymen crowded, chattering in little groups or reading their mail with conspicuous, proud absorption, as if receiving any letter, preferably from America, gave them prestige. They were not orphans or exiles, their faces above the fluttering sheets of paper declared, ah no, they were the darlings of fine old families back home; they were sadly missed; no matter how unnoticed they were in Europe they were adored across the sea, where great things awaited them.

Christine was surprised to find herself feeling woefully abandoned and helpless. No letters. No bonds anywhere. She pushed her way back upstairs toward the exit. The doorway was jammed with people waiting for a lull in the rain, but to Christine getting wet seemed of no matter now. She plunged outdoors. A hand grasped her elbow and there was her friend from the Pam Pam, beaming at her.

"Come over to the Café de la Paix for a *fine* till the rain stops," he said. "This Paris rain really soaks you and then it freezes you. I'll even give you my *Herald* for an umbrella. You can't ruin that Dior suit."

It was a birthday present from Miss Lesley, and in her mind Christine could hear herself telling Miss Patterson that there were a lot of top-drawer men in the very best shoes who didn't have the intelligence to recognize a Dior. She pulled the *Herald* over her shoulders.

"There ought to be fatter newspapers in France," she complained.

"They need all their paper for ledgers and other *paperage*," her companion explained.

She let herself be hurried across the boulevard into the café. Miss Lesley's shadow was disappearing, she thought. This was the beginning of Christine Drummond.

"I need a hot rum," she said, shivering.

"Don't you want to read your letters?" Christine asked him.

They were on their second drink and the rain was still

pouring down outside. The young man, whose name was Max Dolan, had ordered a petite marmite and hors d'oeuvres for them, too, as a sort of high tea, he explained. He was short and broad-shouldered with a twang in his accent that she placed vaguely in Indiana or Michigan, but it turned out he was from California.

"All the Midwest accents and characteristics are blown up kingsize in California," he explained, and as for reading his letters — "I don't care about my letters. Once you shake them and find no checks the letters will be nothing but hardluck stories. If people aren't going to send you money why should they expect you to read their boring excuses? I hope you get better returns on those desperate letters you were writing in the Pam Pam."

"Did I really look desperate?" Christine asked.

"For a girl as well dressed and as well fed looking as you, yes," he said. "I had a hunch you were writing a suicide note."

"And you decided to save me," she laughed. "So that was why you spoke."

"No indeed," he said. "I only wanted to be around when you did it. You see I pick up a few hundred francs now and then giving the newspapers tips. Beautiful American heiress, alone in Paris, jumps in Seine."

"I'm afraid I'm letting you down," Christine said. "Did you have any other theories about me?"

"You're in some kind of jam, I could tell that much," he said. "You've left your lover or your husband and you don't know what to do next."

He signaled the waiter and gave him some instructions in fluent French.

"Well?" he challenged her. "Am I right?"

"I envy your French," she replied equivocally.

He shrugged.

"I speak a hell of a good Italian and Spanish, too," he said. "What of it? In ten years cruising around over here I haven't met anybody who had anything new to say in any language. And what's the good of knowing how to order a fine dinner in four languages if you can't pay for it? The only communications that matter are without language."

Carefully weaving her way to them was a tall cadaverous girl in a black raincoat, blue beret pulled tight over lank black locks, inevitable pigskin shoulderbag swinging from her shoulders. Without waiting for an invitation the girl slid into the seat beside Christine. She had a long pearly white face with a large nose, its angularity softened by a wide engaging smile and huge gray eyes. The eyes seemed to lap up Christine's glass.

"*Un grog* for me, too," she said. "Double. A spot of tea for chaser, too. I'm frozen."

"Jackie Griswold," the young man explained with a casual wave of hand and added, to Christine's surprise since she could not recall having given her name, "and this is Christine Drummond."

The girl must have been proud of her extraordinary skinniness, for under the mussy raincoat she wore a skintight black turtleneck sweater and perilously tight black

corduroy slacks with a wide silver gaucho belt that seemed no bigger than a napkin ring. An artist, Christine guessed, and found herself instinctively clutching her purse. That was the hopeless thing about living so long with the rich; the money did not rub off on you, but the attitude about it did, the conviction that all artists and working people are out to get it away from you. And she was ashamed to find her back stiffening, just as Miss Lesley Patterson's would have done, when her companions struck up a jolly conversation with two strange men at the next table.

"Londoners," Jackie murmured to her. "Their first day in Paris and the way they've been staring at Christine here I think they'd love to join us. What say? We might get a bottle of bubbly out of them."

"Oh let's not," Christine said faintly.

"You're right, we can do better," Jackie laughed. "Max, isn't she darling? How'd you find her?"

"I followed her down Capucines over to the Pam Pam and then American Express," Max shamelessly confessed, and Jackie complimented him on his cleverness. She was effusive in her approval of Christine, her hair, clothes, complexion, and suggested things they must do together. What was her favorite café? What about dinner tonight? What was she planning to do in Paris, or was she off to Italy? The trouble was that Italy was so full of Americans now. And photographers. Jackie herself was a photographer, indeed she had come over four years ago thinking to keep going by taking pictures, but the competition! And the expense! She was trying to specialize in portraits of men and she'd love

to get Christine's opinion of her stuff, though a landlady on the Rue de Buci was holding her equipment until she paid an old bill. She'd tried to get Max Dolan to try to steal it back for her but you know what cowards men are. Maybe Christine —

"Oh I'm a terrible coward," Christine made haste to assure her.

They were so generous in their friendly confidences that she wanted to tell them about herself, too, but this was not easy. No she was not in films, as Jackie eagerly suggested, but merely traveling with an older friend as companion-secretary —

"What did you do to have her kick you out?" Jackie sympathetically inquired, and looked smilingly incredulous when Christine tried to explain that she had not been kicked out. Max gallantly offered to go see the lady on Christine's behalf and make her see Christine's side, force her to let her come back. Just because she was rich — he deduced the old lady must be rich — was no excuse for leaving a pretty girl high and dry in Paris. But she wasn't high and dry, Christine tried to protest, she had left in order to make a fresh start, that was all.

Max looked unconvinced.

"It didn't look that way to me when I spotted you, dear," he said. "You were writing a lot of messages asking to be forgiven. That was my guess. Never mind, we'll help fix you up. Maybe you can help Jackie get men to be photographed."

"Fine! Where are you staying?" Jackie was enthusiastic. "How much do you pay?"

Christine stiffened, then she realized that this was the way Miss Lesley froze when strangers asked these candid questions. Christine had been the one who defended the strangers, explaining that it was not impudence but friendly curiosity that need offend no one. One traveled to find out how other people lived, didn't one? Miss Lesley would surely have smiled to see her democratic little protégé doing the freezing now. Thinking of this, Christine hastily answered, without naming her hotel, that she paid two thousand francs a day.

"Two thousand francs a day!" gasped Jackie and Max shook his head incredulously. They started chattering at this outrage. For only six thousand francs they could buy back Jackie's little room on the Rue de Buci, retrieve her kodak and belongings, and all three of them could live there, pooling their funds.

"But I won't have any more funds to pool," Christine said, nervously. "I have to save out enough for my ticket back home."

"Never mind, we'll look after you," Max declared. "Maybe you won't have to go back to America, eh Jackie?"

Max dropped an arm around Christine's shoulder. She shrank back, feeling helpless between her two new friends. His wet duffel coat smelled of stale smoke, sour laundry and moldy cupboards. This was what Miss Lesley would have noticed at once, and Christine would have been impatient with her for allowing such superficial trifles to affect her opinions of people.

"Stop sputtering about having a date when you just told us you don't know anybody here," Max urged her genially. "Tell you what. Let's mush over to the Deux Magots for a drink. We always do about this time. Then we'll sneak over to de Buci and show you Jackie's place."

"I'd love to get past that concierge just for spite," Jackie said and patted Christine's hand affectionately. "Max always has such wonderful ideas. It's because he doesn't give a damn what anybody thinks of him."

"Why should I?" Max answered. "The advantage of having no name and no money is you got nothing to lose."

Christine was withdrawing her other hand rather firmly from Max's clasp, and Jackie, misconstruing this rebuff, smiled.

"Don't worry about my being jealous over Maxie," she said. "We've never been a Thing. We just run into each other like all the other regulars over here, all one big family."

"That's the trouble," said Max. "We cross the ocean to drop our families and then collect an ever bigger, lousier, ersatz family over here, all knowing each other's business and crossing each other up like brothers and sisters."

"Isn't he a doll?" asked Jackie, and leaned past Christine to ask, "I'm not crossing you up with Christine, Maxie boy. I'm trying to help."

"Do many Americans find jobs over here?" Christine interrupted, in some confusion.

"An interesting question," Max answered gloomily. "What do they do? They live in slums they wouldn't be caught dead in back home, they scavenge for drinks, and

wait for each other's money from home, and tell each other their wonderful prospects. They keep little books like mine with addresses of everybody they hear mentioned in case they can use them. They — "

"They?" interrupted Jackie, mildly. "*They?*"

Max shrugged.

"Never mind. You'll catch on soon enough," he assured Christine. "When we're panning the French or Italians it's *they* and when we're roasting our native land it's *they*, and since all your time is spent doing one or the other there's very little we-ing, you'll find."

He jumped up, waving toward someone flitting past.

"There's that guy who promised me opera tickets," he said. "Get some American cigarettes for me while I'm gone, will you, girls?"

"Okay," said Jackie as he dashed out. She leaned toward Christine and confided, "Max can really be a help. He can introduce you to people and get you in a lot of parties — I mean, with you along they wouldn't dare turn him out."

She stood up beside the table, holding her palm out like a child.

"Better give me enough for half a dozen packs," she said.

Christine obediently fumbled in her purse, finding only coins and two five-thousand-franc notes, one of which she handed out.

"That'll do," said Jackie carelessly and glided off between the tables.

How friendly they were, Christine told herself. She would be delighted with them, she knew, if only Miss Lesley were sitting at another table, half amused and half shocked at her easy way with strangers. But without Miss Lesley to play up to, the game was pointless. The thought of becoming deeper involved with the two companions suddenly filled her with terror, and no sensible reasoning could keep down her wild urge to escape before these new claimants closed in on her. She hurried guiltily out to the entrance, glimpsed Jackie coming upstairs from below, and rushed out to a dark corner under the awning where two American matrons were waving their umbrellas for a taxi.

"It isn't that I mind having to pay the check all the time," one of them was complaining shrilly. "And I suppose it's my own fault for slipping them the money under the table just so I don't look too silly, but what I do hate is the way they always keep all the change! That was a ten-thousand-franc note I slipped Philippe. The check was only for six thousand and he must have undertipped because the waiter only snarled at him. And then he calmly puts the change in his own wallet!"

"If you'd asked him for it he'd just have called you an American!" sighed the other.

A taxicab slid to a stop and they clambered into it but the next minute the door opened to let them out again into the downpour with the driver shouting at them. He was not going in the direction of Neuilly at this hour, he shouted, nor had he any intention of doing so. Fortunately Christine's address was agreeable to him and she got in gratefully, leaving the two ladies waving umbrellas desperately at other cabs.

Sitting back in the cab she breathed relief at having escaped without having had to find excuses for refusing Jackie's apartment. Things would have gotten difficult in another moment, she told herself and then realized she was reacting just like Miss Lesley, hexed by the same taboos, stubbornly closing doors as they opened to her. Tears of vexation sprang to her eyes that she could only be herself rebelling against Miss Lesley and without that opposition she was nothing. Like a pet poodle, she thought, straining hotly at the leash but the minute the chain is removed it clings, trembling, to its mistress's skirts. So this was her brave leap into the independent life — afraid of anything new, afraid of herself — *afraid!*

For two cents I'd turn around and go back just to teach myself a lesson, she thought, but she made no move to do so.

In the morning Christine had the old familiar waking dream that she was free, and though she struggled to hang on to the joyous feeling, the sense that Miss Lesley was waiting for her, needing her, broke through and she awoke, sighing. Drowsily she tried to remember whether this was the day they were going to drive to Homestead for the baths, or were they preparing to welcome a houseful of California Pattersons? She forced her eyes open and saw the great black armoire, its doors flapping open to show the meagerness of her wardrobe. There were her stockings, panties and bra drying on the back of the chair, her shoes — always wet in this city — steaming on the radiator. Paris!

And she was free, she remembered, but with the first exultation she shivered, forbidden to think of freedom but yanked back to the old prison by her conscience. She pulled the covers up to her chin, staring at the ceiling, fighting the guilty conviction that she had betrayed a trust, heartlessly deserted a child who could not get through a day without her. She put her hands up to her ears instinctively to shut out the echo of Miss Lesley's voice.

"You could never know, child, what a blight it is to grow up with the knowledge that you are ugly — no, no, don't interrupt! My father believed in complete candor so he never let me forget the fact — no, no, I respected him for his honesty, truly I did! Only I did feel I had to hide from people for fear my appearance would offend them. That's why I need you so much. Wherever we go people brighten up at sight of you and I get the joy of it. Can't you see how much happiness you've brought me?"

"But, Miss Lesley, how can you say you're plain, how could anyone say it, when you have those wonderful eyes that see into everybody, and that lovely smile with your beautiful teeth . . ."

"Now, Christine!"

"But it's true, and I won't have you crying like this. Let me rub your back with that heavenly cologne. Now, doesn't that help?"

"A little, yes. I wish it was as easy to soothe my mind. I wish I could wake up without thinking I'm an ugly old woman, old, lonely, and unloved . . ."

"Miss Lesley, I love you! Everyone loves you. You're

not old, and you're noble-looking. How can you believe I don't love you?"

"Dear child. You make me able to face life. But you'll fall in love and leave me . . ."

"No, no, I shan't leave you. Please don't say so . . ."

"I couldn't go on without you now, Christine . . ."

Nonsense! Christine leapt out of bed to shut out the whimpering voice. She'd been bound by a lie. If she'd been that indispensable Miss Lesley would never have taken off without her. She had to keep reminding herself of Miss Lesley's surprising self-sufficiency when it suited her purpose, disconcerting occasions such as those when you glimpse the woefully crippled beggar who has roused your tears skipping nimbly down the street with your handout. How often she had exhausted herself building up Miss Lesley's faith in herself, stroking what seemed a shattered vanity, then found she had been the naïve springboard for the lady's hidden but boundless arrogance! Each time she had vowed not to be taken in again by the whimpering appeals for reassurance, but the next time she was just as gullible — until now.

Her imagination kept going to the present reunion between Miss Lesley and John Lesley, and she told herself she could not have endured it, had she been permitted to come along. In the eight years of their separation he had been closer to her than in their few years' friendship. With Miss Lesley she had gone through his schoolboy scrapbooks, pored over old albums of photographs of the Louisiana Lesleys, picking out John in the graduating class, rowing

crew, track events, filling in the years before he had come to Fairmount Village. She had pasted up the newspaper clippings of his war years, his wedding, his wife's château, his staff at the hospital, at which the bride's father was chief physician, the bride accepting a skiing cup in some Alpine resort.

Vera photographed poorly, he wrote, and that was fine with Christine. The blurred image of the bride made it easier to sustain the obstinate delusion that he still belonged to her. He seldom spoke of his wife in his letters to Miss Lesley — evidently she spent considerable time with her mother in the social life of Paris, London and Rome, for which the girl's father was too busy. Miss Lesley often remarked on the sound practicality of the marriage — furthering John's career in every way and not hamstringing him emotionally, it seemed, nor giving him premature family responsibilities as an American wife would have done. When he was ready to come back to America he would have prestige such as would have taken a lifetime to win, she said, had he slaved away building up a practice at home. Moreover he might have gotten himself tied up with some nurse or otherwise unsuitable mate. These considerations made his absence bearable to Miss Lesley, though she missed him and spoke of him constantly. When his letters lapsed she was in a panic, seeing him gone from her for good, and then she wrote him hysterically of the American heritage he was giving up, of the dangers of his becoming fashionable, and of how his best interests would be served back here. She jogged his attention with cables announcing

stocks she was turning over to him, favorable changes in her will. Naturally he must respond with proper gratitude, and once he had been secured on the hook — confessing to deep homesickness for old Fairmount, asking affectionately for his old friends, the servants, the dogs — Miss Lesley was appeased. If he was weak enough to be homesick, then she could be the strong one and assure him he was doing what was best.

There were always, in his letters, little questions about Tina, how fine it was that she stayed on, merry messages to be given to her.

These tender morsels were never given to Christine at the time the letter arrived but were hoarded like sugar lumps by Miss Lesley to be used at the proper moment, times, say, when she had used her authority in a highhanded way and later felt she may have gone too far and must placate Christine. Christine had come to see through the strategy but was resigned to it, and instead of resenting it was angry at herself for being won over so easily.

She could almost foresee the circumstance that would bring out the lady's transparent little game. Usually it would happen during a long spell of "nerves," when Miss Lesley would not stir from her cabin if they were on ship, or from her hotel bedroom if they were in some quiet resort. Christine was obliged to be on hand to massage the back, brush the hair, dry the tears, read, console, flatter, sing, pacify. Freed when Miss Lesley's sleeping pills finally worked, Christine escaped and welcomed enthusiastically whatever company the place afforded. Alone and released

from strain, she had been perhaps more susceptible than at other times. There was the fascinating purser who read T. S. Eliot to her, imitated the other passengers and made her laugh even when he was attempting to seduce her; there was the English playwright living on one of the islands in barren splendor who begged her to stay; there was the Texas engineer in Acapulco who almost persuaded her they could be happy together.

Perhaps the certainty that something would certainly interrupt made these fleeting courtships more intense and Christine more emotional, nearer to surrender. There were sudden fierce embraces, moments to hint where this was leading and indeed where she longed to be led, but instead they served as a warning bell. Like Cinderella she must break away and return to Miss Lesley's side, half rueful and half glad to retreat, aware that her panic must seem only capricious to the man. She wasn't sure whether it was duty, devotion or fear of her own passion that made her as relieved to get back to Miss Lesley as Miss Lesley was relieved to see her.

"I ought to send you out to have a good time, I know," Miss Lesley would sigh, while Christine gently brushed her hair to ease the headache. "I'm beastly selfish, tying you down to a boring sickroom."

"But you're not selfish at all, and I'm not at all bored," Christine would eagerly assure her.

"Of course you're bored," Miss Lesley would sigh, which would tempt Christine to describe her newest friendship in the most glowing terms.

"I'm so glad!" Miss Lesley would exclaim. "That makes me feel so much better. You sound as if you're falling in love, exactly as a young girl should, and I'm so glad. It's sweet of you to tell me about it, letting me share the fun."

It may have been sweet but it was not very clever, for it would be invariably the day after this confession that Miss Lesley would feel amazingly recovered, ready and resolved to start at once for home or the next port. Perhaps there was time to bid goodbye to the new friend, more likely there was not. It was astonishing how briskly efficient the invalid could be on these occasions, managing the packing, cabling and handling last-minute details with no need for assistance so that Christine had no excuse for suggesting delay. When she did have the chance to say goodbye to the lover it was awkward and usually downright disagreeable.

"But only last night you promised me — You said nothing about leaving today — "

"I must because Miss Lesley has decided so," Christine would explain.

"But you're a grown woman, not a slave or a child. Why should this old woman ruin our lives?"

There was no explaining her subservience, for she did not herself understand why she permitted herself to be hustled away like an heiress from avid fortune hunters, when she had been so close to a serious love affair. Inevitably the man felt betrayed and insulted and would never have believed that for years afterward he would figure in Christine's thoughts, in a kind of game she played, imagining where

they would be and how it would be had she married him at that time. The ranch in California (that was the purser's suggestion), the traveling in the Far East (that was the Texan's offer), whatever it was, the dreams went on in full detail at the back of her mind as if part of her had really chosen that life. It surprised her that she bore Miss Lesley no resentment for having taken the final choice out of her hands.

Miss Lesley herself had weeping spells of remorse, obliging Christine to reassure her again and again that she was happier with her than if she had accepted the suitor. There would be special gifts of consolation, jewels chosen from her own heirlooms, and above all there would be the invocation of Cousin John, reconstruction of old days with him, and constant talk of him as if to remind Christine how narrowly she had escaped settling for an inferior.

"Listen to this letter from John," Miss Lesley said on one of these occasions, fetching a letter out of her handbag and holding it tenderly before her as if it were a rare folio. " 'I wish I could say I am completely happy here, but agreeable as this place is, professionally it seems to me a dead end and I wonder where I go from here. Vera loves it, for it is her country, but I never fall asleep without thinking of Fairmount Village. I think of racing down the hill to your gate with Tina and the dogs, you sending the car to bring us back to dinner as if we were lost children as soon as we were out of your sight. I wonder about that dear child and count upon you to keep her from throwing herself away on the wrong guy — ' " Here Miss Lesley folded

up the letter carefully and replaced it in her bag. "I wrote him that he needn't worry about your judgment of men. You've seen far too many, I told him, to settle for any but the best."

That was why she had accepted Miss Lesley's rule, Christine excused herself; it wasn't that she was weakly submissive; it was because her heart agreed with Miss Lesley that any other man but John was a cheap makeshift. She did not believe Miss Lesley suspected the depths of her feeling about him, or she would not be revealing these little items from John's letters that showed he still thought of her. Miss Lesley's tactics were only to set up an ideal firmly in Christine's mind who would act also as scarecrow, chasing off marauders, and save Christine for her own use. It was, in a way, like her mother's strategy of gently ridiculing all suitors and friends until the girl found no pleasure in them and even felt embarrassed that her tastes had fallen below her mother's expectations.

Christine didn't like to think about her mother. It made her sad, as if she were long dead. People are dead long before the grave, she thought. There is that dear child that was once oneself; there is that dear loving woman who was the mother and then became the complete stranger. No, Christine corrected herself, she did not become the stranger, she was merely revealed to be the stranger. How much better if she had stayed forever disguised in the gay masks the bemused child had made for her! She thought of that first year at Miss Lesley's, half homesick for the old comradeship with her mother, half remorseful at living in luxury while her mother must be needing her help. She tried to see everything with her mother's eyes, collecting tidbits to delight her mother on her fortnightly visits home.

Imagine living in a house with half a dozen bedrooms never used no matter how many guests arrived, she would exclaim! Talk about Mr. Stoddard's four-poster — there were a dozen of them here, some for long-ago children, the ruffled figured-lawn curtains and spreads dating back generations! Carpets so thick you thought you were in quicksand! A banquet dining room, a "family" dining room that would seat sixty, a never used grand ballroom with a gold piano, other pianos and even a Hammond organ ("When you think of how long it took us to afford one little upright, Mother! She has three, mind you, always kept in tune and only one ever used!"). Life-size statues and busts in the corridors, gloomy enormous oil paintings in gold frames a foot wide, etchings, shadowboxes, consolation pieces of weeping maidens under weeping willows embroidered on velvet! ("Perfectly wonderful, I think, Mother, and I can't understand John Lesley making fun of everything!")

Imagine, too, a family so huge and interwoven that a never-ending chain of cousins to the eighth degree were forever rotating around the croquet grounds or putting green, or solemnly going over family history with Miss Lesley! ("She pretends it's a bore to John, because he teases her about it, but really she's terribly proud of the family.")

"Don't think John Lesley isn't proud, too," Mrs. Drum-

mond sagely commented. "If nobody else was doing the bragging, he would!"

"She knows all their names, mind you!" Christine said.

"It's nice to see a family so devoted they keep up with tenth cousins," Mrs. Drummond observed approvingly. "Goodness, it's all I can do to remember our Indiana and Vermont first cousins' names for Christmas cards."

"It isn't devotion, Mother!" Christine explained. "John Lesley tells me it is the same in all families where there are big estates. They aren't clinging to their kin out of loyalty, they're just hanging on to their share of the property for dear life — "

"Now Tina, that's not a nice thing to say," reproached her mother.

"But it's true," insisted Christine. "That's why they're always marrying their lawyers or bankers, to get free advice on doing their relatives out of a bit. That's why the cousins are always marrying each other, to keep the family control of some railroad or corporation."

Then she would mimic a family discussion of the line of descent from the first Owen Spinder Patterson in Surrey right through the Indian Wars, Revolution, reciting the extent and boundaries of property, disposition of same, until Mrs. Drummond would burst out laughing, "My word, Tina, you're as deep in it as they are." Afterward she would mildly rebuke Christine for taking such a frivolous attitude about a sacred matter like family fortunes, and without the support of her mother's laughter the habits of the rich lost amusement value. Instead the standards of her mother and

the life she had just left began to seem amazing and amusing to the girl, and changing her mother's reading glasses for Miss Lesley's, she switched, almost unconsciously, to the opposite point of view, entertaining Miss Lesley with stories of her mother's peasant foibles and delightfully simple ways.

To be free, Christine thought, was to be lost. If she could only believe again, trust someone utterly! If people would only have the kindness to keep up their masquerades. But no, little by little, they must unburden themselves of their deceits, down to the bleak skeleton, until love was frightened away. She thought of the father she had known only through her mother's bitter anecdotes, and she wished he had bequeathed her more of his reckless flair for taking every day and every person at face value, without fears or regrets. So far as she knew he had never reproached his wife for casting him out, nor had he begged forgiveness. Wherever he was and whatever he felt about his lost family no one knew. Christine surprised herself by feeling a secret pride in the way he had baffled her mother, never becoming the nuisance or public disgrace predicted. If he had died in a drunken stupor or in some gambling hell at least no one knew of it. By the time she had gotten into high school Christine wished she knew a side to the legend other than her mother's.

"At least he had pride," she said to her mother. "If he's had troubles he never came back bothering you."

"How can you take his side when you can't even remember him?" her mother expostulated irritably.

There had been the time Mr. Stoddard bought a new car and took the whole family on a day's outing to Saratoga. They had started out at daybreak to make sure of getting there in time for the races. All along the highway they were hailed by hitchhikers but Mr. Stoddard was firm in his refusals in spite of Mother's kindhearted appeals. Such a kid, that sailor, so exhausted-looking, that old man! Then they caught sight of a tall jaunty man striding along ahead, newspaper under his arm which he pulled out and waved to them. Suddenly Christine saw her mother's face, pale and frightened, looking back.

"Hurry, Mr. Stoddard!" she exclaimed. "Do let's go faster or we'll never get there."

"But that man looks so jolly, let's pick him up!" Jeanie exclaimed, squirming around in her seat to look back at the wayfarer, who had tucked his newspaper back under his arm and was trudging along philosophically once more.

"It's like Mr. Stoddard says, we can't be picking up everybody," her mother said crossly. She stayed irritable the rest of the day, so the outing wasn't the fun they'd planned.

That night Christine heard her mother and Mr. Stoddard talking on the porch after she had gone to bed.

"I tell you it upset me to see him after all these years," she heard her mother say. "There he was, just a common tramp, hitchhiking to the races. Supposing you'd picked him up! It upsets me just thinking what might have happened! Think of the girls!"

"You're sure?" Mr. Stoddard asked.

"Of course I'm sure!" her mother cried. "I'd know Tracy Drummond anywhere. Swaggering along with that old spit-in-the-eye way, independent as you please."

Her father, Christine had thought in amazement. She woke Jeanie to tell her. This was a mistake, for Jeanie's idea of her father was of a sinister villain who might swoop down and kidnap her if she didn't get better grades in school, so she fell to sobbing bitterly at her danger until Christine had soothed her back to sleep. But how could their mother go on riding along in Mr. Stoddard's Buick when a man who had once been her husband was tramping miles along that hot dusty road? For Christine it was a sleepless, unhappy night puzzling over this strange cruel side to the mother she adored. She felt ashamed of her unwitting part in the cruelty and she tried to keep back the furtive doubts of her mother. When she fell asleep she dreamed of jumping out of the car and running back to her father. It was a dream that came back again and again. When she told her mother about it her mother looked at her with a puzzled frown.

"I don't understand what's gotten into you, Christine! After all the things I've told you about your father I believe you're ready to sympathize with him," she said wonderingly. "You were too little, of course, to understand what it meant for me to be left alone with you children days and weeks without a dollar or a word from him, then a note from the other end of nowhere with maybe a ten-dollar bill, and maybe popping in the next week broke. And the women calling up for him, and the collectors after him!"

"You said he sent you presents," Christine protested. "A diamond ring, you said, and once a wrist watch with emeralds and pearls."

"The next month he was doing me the favor of pawning them," Mrs. Drummond said caustically. "Oh he was a fine parent! Just what do you think would have happened to you children if I hadn't closed the door on him and taken in my roomers?"

Christine was contrite but she had given her mother food for thought.

"That's just the way it will work out," she mourned. "After I've raised you girls single-handed you'll like as not turn against me when you're grown up and give all your love to the father that deserted you."

Christine was seventeen before bits of the real story put themselves together sketchily. Her father had quit the city newspaper job at her mother's insistence to work on the local paper, then he would become bored and go from city to city free-lancing, coaxing his wife to join him when he liked a place, but she stubbornly refused to leave Fairmount. He had stopped sending money back after one trip home when he found that his wife, with no assistance from him, had purchased the house they had been renting. He had, according to the wisps of gossip that finally filtered through to Christine's innocent mind, accused a lodger of being his wife's lover and the cause of her refusal to leave Fairmount. When he left for good he was not deserting his family so much as surrendering to a situation he could not handle.

It was strange that her mother, for all her bitterness about his minor misdeeds, betrayed no indignation at his slur on her honor, and indeed never spoke of it to Christine. Perhaps in her quixotic feminine way she forgave the big things.

—

A week had passed with no indication that her absence from the Villa Topaze had roused suspicion. Christine had written a second message to Miss Patterson in Switzerland to quiet her in case she was telephoning the villa. It was depressing to find that her days of freedom were spent in churning over the same worries — What should she do if Miss Lesley should come after her? — What should she do if that didn't happen? She would go back to America, yes, New York, yes, but then what?

Finally she decided to telephone the Villa Topaze in Bougeval to see if there were messages for her. There was the usual confusion on the telephone — Miss Patterson was not there, Miss Drummond was not there, the chauffeur was not there, and then after straightening out these lines came the surprising word that if Mademoiselle wished she might speak to Madame Patterson's English nurse, who was occupying the apartment. Before Christine could digest this news the high clear British voice was on the other end of the wire.

"Mrs. Rogers speaking. Where are you calling from, Miss Drummond?"

Christine mumbled some answer about friends in Paris and then inquired what messages had come from her employer.

"Dr. Lesley sent to London for me," said the lady. "He said Miss Patterson would have to extend her stay for some special treatments, and I am waiting here for them to send the chauffeur back for me. She requires several things from here which I'm putting together."

They must have tried to reach her at the villa, Christine thought instantly, before they sent for Mrs. Rogers.

"I was told you were called to Paris on a family matter and Miss Patterson did not want to trouble you," the voice trilled on.

"But if Miss Lesley is sick — " Christine heard herself saying mechanically, and clenched her hands to stop from going on.

"Don't be disturbed, Miss Drummond," the other said with a confidential little chuckle. "You know our lady. I gather from Dr. Lesley it's only one of her mildly depressed states, an emotional reaction from the trip and meeting him after so many years. He thinks it best to treat it as a physical condition."

"I see," Christine said, sinking her teeth in her wrist now to keep herself from offering to help.

The brief pause must have told the other woman what was on Christine's mind for she said, "It must be a relief to you to get away, my dear. You've been so tied down, with no life of your own. You've really spoiled the old girl, you know, letting her use you. I'm fifty-two and I can bully her and make her like it. But you're young yet — not getting any younger, though, don't forget that, dearie. You make the most of this little rest-up and if there's anything I can do — "

For a minute Christine wanted to ask her to send whatever was in her closet and the bureau drawers, but she dared not trust her too much.

"There's nothing, Mrs. Rogers," she said. "And really I haven't been 'used' as you say. It's been my fault if I have."

At least no one was on the hunt for her, she thought as she hung up the receiver. That was something. She had more time to settle her plans, too, with the extension in Miss Lesley's visit. Certainly she should have felt relieved.

Instead she found herself wandering around the Place Vendôme staring in shop windows without seeing, thinking of John Lesley sending for Mrs. Rogers instead of for her. Curious that Miss Lesley had not protested, either. The natural thing would have been for Miss Lesley, with the excuse of an "attack," to have sent the car back for both Christine and a nurse, and even her favorite masseur, for she insisted on her own cast in her little sickroom dramas. Mrs. Rogers indicated that Christine's alibi for being in Paris had been accepted at its face value. Did John Lesley suspect something and was this his way of helping her out? Or was he afraid, as Gordon said Miss Lesley was, of what might happen if they two should meet again?

It had begun to rain harder, reminding her again of the fine rain clothes abandoned at Miss Lesley's, and all the other clothing she needed now but had not dared to take. No matter what happened, she would have to buy a few new things to keep her going. She hastened her steps toward the little boutique on the Rue St. Honoré where she had shopped for Miss Lesley. Some blouses, perhaps, hose,

lingerie . . . In the shop she forgot her immediate worries in the gratification at being remembered by the saleswoman and in finding the items she wanted with no trouble. She bought a frilly blouse deliberately deafening herself to a faint echo of Miss Lesley's remonstrance, "Are you sure it's what you like, dear? Isn't it a wee bit *poule de luxe*?" When the packages were assembled for her she was discomfited to discover that the cash and travelers checks in her purse did not make up the total bill of some fifty thousand francs. She had left more money in the hotel safe but she had not expected to need it until time to buy her steamship ticket.

"Shall we put it on Madame Patterson's bill?" suggested the salesgirl politely. "That will be more convenient."

Hastily Christine protested that on second thoughts she did not want the frilly blouse and one underslip would be enough, after all. She managed to keep enough change to pay for a taxi home, but the experience shocked her.

Money! She hadn't thought of that. She remembered that Miss Patterson's bank was only a few blocks away and she might try to cash one of her American bank checks, for she had money in the Fairmount bank. They had done it for her many times before. But there was Miss Lesley's special adviser, there, the one who sometimes visited them with his wife. He would demand Miss Lesley's signature and probably write to her about it, besides.

In the taxicab she felt a kind of panic. In her dreams of independence money had not occurred to her as a possible problem. If anything, she had vaguely assumed that whatever she did after leaving Miss Lesley would be to her financial advantage. She had always been a shrewd manager, thrifty in spending and saving, her mother often said. Mrs. Drummond and Jeanie freely admitted their own carelessness in money matters, ends never meeting, nest eggs always being cracked, rainy days never foreseen. If they only had Christine's genius, they cried! Miss Lesley, too, swore that it was Christine's common sense that saved her thousands.

But all in a moment Christine saw that her solvency of the past ten years had not been due to her sensible management but to conditions she had blindly accepted. Her salary frequently went to the bank without being touched. All the essentials had been spread under her like the grass itself. A home, transportation, laundry, cigarettes, mending, drugs, even stationery, knitting wool, magazines — trifles she had taken for granted along with rain or sunshine, when totted up now in her little Paris notebook ran into thousands of francs before she had even paid her hotel bill.

In a week I've spent more money than I have in all the months traveling with Miss Lesley, she thought, aghast at her own stupidity. All these years she had been borne around in a cozy perambulator, blithely sure that she was the one who made it go.

It was time I got some sense, she told herself angrily.

She would have to make immediate plans for a new job, that was certain. She would cable an ad to the *New York Times* —

Cable? She was on her own expense, now, she reminded

herself. She would write. When she got out of the taxi at her hotel she looked at the five-hundred-franc note in her hand carefully, as if seeing money for the first time, and she counted the tip carefully. When she tipped for Miss Lesley it used to gratify her to hear the obsequious thanks. Well, she reflected, she might as well get used to hearing the disapproving grunt the driver gave her at receiving the exact percentage.

She thought of Mrs. Rogers, ordering her cutlets and whiskey in the Hotel Martine dining room, alone probably, for Miss Lesley would be with John. She could imagine the luxurious suite and the beautiful view, the balcony on the lake, the rides with Gordon along the mountain roads. She closed her eyes, recalling that wave of excitement that overtook her whenever they set foot in a new place, as if This would be the place where it might happen, whatever it was to be. Always Miss Lesley's overwhelming shadow blotted out the anticipatory picture, and sometimes she left with only a memory of a sickroom smell, the same all over the world. Switzerland would have been different, for John Lesley was there, but that was gone now.

The Alexandria-Cherbourg lobby seemed shabby and infinitely dreary when she came in with her packages. Michel was sorting mail and it seemed to her that his glance was neither admiring as it had been before nor friendly, but went from her packages to her damp clinging clothes, guessing at once that she had not had enough money to buy what she liked, guessing that she had had to give back the prettiest blouse, that tonight she planned to dine on

pears and cheese in her room, and that soon she would not be able to pay her hotel bill.

Christine straightened her shoulders, telling herself that no matter what happened she must always behave like the Rich American. She hurried past the desk, knowing there would be no letters or messages. There would not even be detectives looking for her. Perhaps this time they did not want her back. Cousin John and Miss Lesley may have decided she was not indispensable to Miss Lesley's happiness at all, but an encumbrance. Mrs. Rogers, a sound, practical, hard-boiled trained nurse and others just like her could handle all of the lady's needs.

Perhaps, the insidious whisper went on in Christine's ear, she hadn't run away at all, but had been ever so subtly nudged out.

Miss Lesley had behaved strangely that last night, she thought, accustomed though one was to the lady's caprices. Christine tried to think back and find a clue to the quixotic change of plan. They had talked about the reunion in Switzerland for months, discussed other relatives in Europe at the time who might be summoned there to make it a gala affair. They had speculated on what John's wife would be like, and whether he would be changed. Christine had helped the maid pack Miss Lesley's bags and had saved her own to do at the last minute. Even at dinner that night in their suite they had talked excitedly of the journey. No, Christine remembered, she herself had talked excitedly, but come to think back, Miss Lesley had been very quiet. When

she went into her own room she was aware that Miss Lesley was doing some telephoning, a complicated chore in France that she usually left to Christine. A little while later she came to the door of Christine's room and looked at the stack of lingerie Christine had just taken out of the bureau drawer.

"It looks like a trousseau," she observed. "Did you just buy it?"

"Goodness, no," Christine answered, mildly puzzled. "You mean I won't need all this?"

Miss Lesley was silent a moment while Christine waited.

"I've just decided it would be better for me to make the trip alone," she said. "Gordon can look after me perfectly and there'll be John's staff to call on when I get there. Fortunately you haven't started your packing yet. I should have thought of it sooner, but there's absolutely no reason you shouldn't have a little vacation and this is the perfect time for it. I can manage beautifully."

Christine could only stare at her as she automatically replaced the lingerie in the drawer.

"Will John think it's wise for you to come alone?" she asked in a strained voice.

"I'm sure it's wise," Miss Lesley said distantly. "There are so many things to be considered, after all — his position there, and his wife's family being so important, and all those factors that matter so much over here, things we forget about in Fairmount Village, but one can't dismiss them —"

"What things?" Christine asked stupidly, but she hardly

listened as Miss Lesley rambled vaguely on about standards, talk, public opinion, ending up with some mystifying remark about it being for everyone's good. Whatever she was getting at, all Christine could think was that if she was not to see John Lesley then this was the open gate she had long been hunting. At other times when Miss Lesley worked up some fantasy for her own unhappiness it had been Christine's job to reason it out with her, but this time she was too shocked to do anything but accept it.

Thinking back over Miss Lesley's abrupt change of attitude that night, Christine could read new meanings. It was possible that John Lesley had said something in a letter or over the telephone that indicated too much interest in Christine. Self-absorbed as the lady was Miss Lesley had a sixth sense that warned her of threats to her personal comfort. She needed John as her private property and she needed Christine, but something had alerted her to the danger of their reunion and she sensed that together, the two could generate something that would obliterate her.

In her fear for herself she may have deliberately left the gate open.

"Mademoiselle!"

The salutation always came out like a whip and made Christine freeze on the spot. The instant she entered a shop some female voice cracked out this word in a tone packed with suspicion of planned larceny, of crimes past and future, and it sounded a threat of exposure, excommunication, implacable justice. Instinctively she reached for

her passport and visa, half expecting to find in her purse the stolen rubies or whatever was missing. One false step, my girl, and off you go, the voice seemed to say. Yet when the speaker came into view the face was often pleasant enough. Never smiling, to be sure, for the French do not waste smiles. So the proprietréss of the Alexandria-Cherbourg, though paid a fortnight in advance for the room and therefore not legitimately hostile to Miss Drummond, still maintained a drill-sergeant crackle to her voice that reduced Christine to jelly.

"Yes, Madame Jouvel," she quavered. She had gloomily finished her fruit and tea in her room and was on her way for a walk before going to bed. For a moment she had a wild idea that perhaps Madame Jouvel was going to say that economizing in her room was against the law.

"You do not ask for your messages," accused Madame.

"No," admitted Christine. "No one knows my address."

This probably sounded sinister to Madame's suspicious ears. She inspected Christine, the black eyes behind the thick nose glasses pricing the suit, hat, handbag, even the blush.

"Nevertheless a gentleman has telephoned for you," Madame stated triumphantly. "He would not leave his name but he will call again perhaps in person."

Christine stood still, racking her brain for some clue as to what had gone wrong. How could anyone have guessed the name of her hotel when she had only thought of it herself by chance a few hours before she arrived?

"You're quite sure the name was Drummond?" she asked stupidly.

"Christine Drummond is your name, is it not, mademoiselle?" Madame retorted impatiently. "Do you wish me to give him a message when he calls again?"

"Never mind," Christine replied and hurried out to the street.

A private detective, she thought, remembering those other times. Perhaps Miss Lesley had telephoned her back at the villa and someone had reported her missing without leaving a message, and suspicions had been aroused. What if the man had walked in the lobby while she was talking to Madame Jouvel. What if he had taken her by surprise by saying, "Miss Patterson sent me to pick you up and bring you to her, Miss Drummond," what would she have done? She pressed her fingers against her eyes as if she could see all too well what would have happened. She would have felt Madame's and Michel's curious gaze on her and in her cowardly fear of a scene she would have said, "Thank you. I'll get my things at once." But perhaps she would have gone up for her bag and then climbed out her window on to the adjoining roof, clambered down the back stairs into the backstreet . . .

Christine smiled mockingly at the fantasy. As if she would dare to struggle openly! No, much as the bolder, other Christine would bluster and rebel, the inner one, ever docile and susceptible, would betray her unless a stronger master appeared.

That was it. She must find some way to commit herself into other hands, no matter whose, and protect herself from the eternal collaborationist within. A lightning glimpse of

herself, repentant, humiliated, back at the Villa Topaze trying to explain to Miss Lesley, made her stiffen with determination. She walked fast, hardly knowing where, stopping to stare in windows without seeing, doubling back on streets as if to put off possible pursuers, finding herself suddenly on the Avenue de l'Opéra as a bus stopped on the corner. The cold rain seemed to penetrate her very bones, and shivering with chill and inner panic, she boarded the bus.

As soon as she sat down she knew what she would do. Odd that decisions could be made without any apparent thought process, popping up in the emergency like a ready-made chop from the deep freeze. Not that it was a decision, she reflected, it was the only possible step for her, and perhaps now it was too late. The bus, heading for the Left Bank, lumbered across the bridge and up the Rue Bonaparte, swerved around the Rue du Bac. The lights of little shops and cafés flickered past, but all Christine saw was the misty reflection of herself in the rain-spattered bus window, a faded negative in a montage of light-struck doorways.

The dream of Paris and the thirst for Paris was more real than the city itself, she thought. The city did not quench the thirst any more than the ocean could quench the thirst for water; the thirst was for thirst, really. What she felt now was a longing for her old longing. She thought of her first anticipation of Paris and how the anticipation went on long after the visits were over. There was no way of finding her Paris in the middle of Miss Lesley's Paris. She thought of her mother and Jeanie begging her for tales of Paris.

What had there been to tell? That they had rushed from the Gare du Nord to the darkest, largest suite in the second-bleakest, stateliest hotel, with Miss Lesley in a querulous state because of the necessary appointments that were delaying their departure for the country. For Miss Lesley Paris was no city of light, but a convenient market center, a handy collection of masseurs, chiropodists, hairdressers, dressmakers, milliners, bankers, all calling at the hotel suite to save her the dull chore of facing the city. Paris was for silk dressmaker suits, gloves and rheumatism, just as Milan was for shoes, wallets and dysentery, and London for cardigans and asthma. Travel, for Miss Lesley, was not so much going or seeing, but for distributing one's time neatly over the year; the map was a calendar and clock; the carefully typed itinerary was no plan for holiday but documentary evidence of a responsible disposal of assets.

Imprisoned in those darkened hotel rooms Christine had speculated on what it would be like to stroll through the streets, look at the people, be part of the crowds. One time she had crept out after Miss Lesley was in bed, and had wandered down to the Rue St. Antoine, bought chestnuts and figs from the street peddlers, peered in shadowy passageways, and then, startled by a man's hand on her arm, had rushed back to the hotel. How jauntily she had described the outing later for Miss Lesley's avid, if shocked, ears! ("I admit I'm just as curious as you, Tina, but you are so brave — reckless, really!") Now there was no Miss Lesley waiting to be fed mock-adventure, and without the gullible audience nothing about her seemed to register, her eyes and

senses floundered about without meaning, like actors without audience or play.

She got out of the bus at the Boulevard St. Germain, picked her way through the puddles to the café, and then stood in the drizzling rain gathering courage. What did she think she was planning to do, the bold Christine shouted at the coward — Address the Académie Française? Plant a bomb for the Premier? Rob the safe?

Why in heaven's name should the prospect of entering a public café like anyone else seem an enterprise of shattering significance? Keep the mind on this one moment, she lectured herself again, not on what it might mean.

Once inside the café doors she was reassured, for everyone else seemed solitary as she was, on this evening. Even the deux Magots were not really together but calmly faced different directions — separate checks, please! However, as soon as she had taken a table a familiar figure duffel-coated and bearded, slid into the chair opposite with a triumphant grin. It was what she hoped would happen.

"I wondered how long it would be before you showed up here," he exclaimed. "Jackie was afraid we'd lost you but I told her you'd be around. How about a *fine*?"

As if she had sniffed the cognac's bouquet Jackie herself materialized through the door, and with a wide smile slid onto the bench beside Christine. To have confidence restored because of the company of these two broken reeds would have struck Christine as idiotic any other time, but now she beamed happily at them. Jackie was wearing the same outfit as before, a little more mussed, her lanky black

locks caught in a pony tail this time, the beanie tight over her head like a skullcap. Her long thin face, deprived of any frame of hair, seemed lacking in a dimension, the large albuminous gray eyes pasted on each side of a cardboard silhouette. She continued to smile so sunnily that Christine was cheered, and a little ashamed of her earlier distrust.

"Written any good suicide notes lately?" Max Dolan asked her jovially. "Don't forget I get first rights when you make up your mind."

"Isn't he a ghoul?" sighed Jackie, pausing to order her double grog as the waiter appeared. "I think that's how Max first picked me up. He thought I was dying of starvation and he actually rushed up with a camera all ready for the shot if I dropped dead."

"It would have been a good shot at that," Max reflected with obvious regret. "I'll bet *Samedi* would have paid me a couple thousand francs for it. Emaciated American heiress faints of starvation against background of Tour d'Argent, where her countrymen — maybe her own parents — are guzzling pressed duck with a Bâtard-Montrachet and Château Yquem chasers. How was I to know she was paid two thousand francs a day to look emaciated?"

"I was modeling," Jackie explained, resting her large eyes on Christine. Like praying mantis eyes, Christine thought uneasily, or like a double periscope sucking in all there was on the landscape. "Not fashions, though of course I have done fashions. No, I was Christ on the Cross, believe it or not, for a crazy artist on the Rue de Seine. A girl with no bosom or hips gets a lot of good breaks that way."

"Did you know that Michelangelo murdered a boy once just to get that look of agony in his Crucifixion?" Max said.

"I damn near had to starve to death to keep that job," Jackie pursued. "As soon as I'd get myself a decent meal this fool artist could tell it and he'd send me away. Said I looked too smug. I'd have to fast for a day and then faint in his doorway before I'd get the job back. He was a lousy artist but he was rich, I'll always say that for him."

"What happened?" Max wanted to know.

"I guess I overdid it," Jackie admitted. "I was always dropping in to see if he needed a model. If he wasn't in I'd swipe a drink and stretch out with his Stan Kenton album. One day he changed the lock on his door, the creep."

Max turned to Christine, nodding toward Jackie as if she had just furnished him valuable evidence.

"You see how it is?" he said. "The traveling American has two choices open to him. Either he has his own place where he finds somebody has moved in on him every time he opens the door, or he has no place and moves in on anybody he meets who has an apartment."

Jackie looked at him with faint reproach.

"The trouble is that when your host gets thrown out you get thrown out, too," she said mournfully. "I hate being thrown out because somebody else didn't pay. That's why I got my own little spot. At least it's my own place I'm locked out of."

"You mentioned it before," Christine said. "I wondered if you still wanted me to come in with you."

Jackie clapped her hands in delight.

"Perfect!" she cried. "We'll go right over and fix it up with the old witch. How about it, Maxie?"

But Maxie thought it would be better to wait till the concierge would be having her dinner and the chances of slipping past her would be better. Then if Christine was agreeable they could settle the deal. He thought it would be good to celebrate the arrangement with another drink, too, doubles this time. Jackie excused herself to speak to a bearded young man in a greasy sports coat and flying muffler who had just come in the door.

"Don't you dare bring him here," Max muttered, and explained to Christine. "You have to watch Jackie. She's so goodhearted she'd give away your last dime. We'd better leave pretty soon."

Christine said she would like to leave. People here looked so lonely, she thought. Even in a group talking eagerly each had a faraway look of being alone, but when she mentioned this Max Dolan shrugged.

"It's not a lonely look, it's a waiting look," he explained. "Everybody's still waiting for that Paris of their dreams. Even when they're making love they keep their eyes open waiting for somebody really worth loving."

Jackie slipped back to her seat as soon as the waiter brought the new round. She was cross with Max for brushing off her other friend and complained that Christine was hers, really, as much as she was his, and he needn't think he would have the complete run of her when she moved in with Jackie just because he saw her first. Max changed the subject by repeating what Christine had said about the

loneliness of the café sitters. Jackie was far from agreeing.

But later, when they left the café, Christine could feel the eyes of the lonely sitters following her as the eyes of portraits do. The portrait eyes looked wistfully after her, she thought, as if they had expected something from her — what — a reprieve?

"I told you that sort of thing wouldn't appeal to you, Tina," she could almost hear Miss Lesley's soothing murmur. "These lost Americans without roots or permanent values are not your kind, child."

If Miss Lesley had been with her these same people would have seemed gay and enviably free, deliberately refuting Miss Lesley's patronizing comment. Without her, the imagined comment tainted everything, just as her mother's mocking word could always reverse her natural response to a person or thing. Miss Lesley, absent, was more powerful than in person, and Christine, facing her own incurable submissiveness, was now convinced that the only way to break the old chains was to accept new ones.

"Lonely or not lonely," Max Dolan said, when they were once more out in the rain, "when they go back to Kansas or Idaho or Glasgow they'll miss their Paris loneliness more than anything in the world."

"You won't be lonesome when you move in with me, I can promise you," Jackie said. "How about a drink at the Montana on our way?"

Christine hastily said she was too wet to go into another bar, but the truth was she wanted to get the apartment matter settled before she could weaken. Moreover she had

only a few francs left after the last bill, which had been presented to her automatically in the café as if it was the normal initiation procedure for newcomers.

Regretfully Jackie pulled her beanie farther over her narrow head until it covered her eyebrows. Her long strides left her raincoat billowing in the wind behind her like a witch-cape as she swept ahead across the boulevard and down a dark street huddled in shadows. Max Dolan's arm was linked in Christine's, his hand firmly clasping hers, but she had no impulse to withdraw. She clung.

"Come on, you love-birds," called Jackie.

"I was afraid, really. It was like a nightmare in a way, because the only lights were from the café we'd left trickling out ever so faintly into the street puddles but not giving any light because in this city nothing is given away. Ahead of us was pitch-darkness with black rain that seemed unreal, that is, I was soaked to the skin but seemed to feel nothing. The strange girl, gaunt as a skeleton in her skin-tight slacks, the raincoat flapping from her shoulders, went loping ahead, parting the black night like a curtain for me and the cocky little man holding my arm. Who are they, anyway, I kept asking myself, what in the world do they want of me, or I of them, where are we going, and why don't I wake myself up and run back to the boulevard for a taxi to my hotel?"

"Why didn't you? They might have been murderers or procurers — " Miss Lesley's voice countered Christine's imaginary conversation which kept running along in her head all the while she was following her night companions down the Rue Benoit.

"It must be the way it happens when you know someone is going to kill you," she pursued. "Your mind tells you that you could break away, scream, run, but there is some code that passes terror, not just the embarrassment of making a scene or the pride in hiding your fear; it is the queer pact between victim and hunter at the point of surrender, when no choice is left. On we went until we came to a great stone wall — I assure you it was a wall, but Jackie pressed some magic spot and it fell open into midnight, so it seemed, but it was a covered passageway. In a window lit up on one side of it we saw a fierce-looking old gray woman with an enormous tiger cat perched on her shoulder and Jackie motioned us to keep out of sight as we crept past to an inner court. There were a few glimmers of light from upstairs windows all around leaking feebly over the wet cobblestones. We slithered across the court to a narrow doorway, and this too opened at Jackie's touch. She lit a match to find the light button. There was an antique *ascenseur*, but Jackie whispered we dared not use it for the noise would bring out the concierge, who would scream at the waste of electricity. The stairs wound round and round like tower stairs and there was a smell like a stone dungeon and I was frightened at what I had gotten myself into but I had to go on with it now, for I couldn't go back. All this time I had the queer sensation of being in a nightmare and yet not wanting to wake myself up — "

"Oh you poor dear child," Miss Lesley's voice whispered urgently. "You see this is what I fear for you. These are the dreadful things that happen to other people, not to me or to my beautiful little Tina!"

"I knew that the top of the stairs meant a final decision for me," Christine pursued. "I would be committed to a new life with Jackie and Max, their friends and their vagabond interests would be mine just as completely as your life has been mine all these years. I would be sitting alone at café tables in Paris or Rome, instead of imprisoned in hotel rooms with you. I would sit down with almost strangers hoping they would buy me a *fine*, instead of signing your suite number to a hotel tab. I would hunt with Jackie and be decoy for Max. I was not You anymore but I wasn't anything else, not my mother, not You — I was an empty shell waiting to be something, something that would overtake me when I reached the top of the stairs."

Angrily Christine shook herself. Here she was, running frantically away from Miss Lesley, but living every moment with her still. Everything was a story to take back to Miss Lesley, who owned her, nothing that was happening had any meaning or reality until it was transferred to Miss Lesley. She was certainly possessed, she thought, carrying on her imaginary dialogues like a stage curtain between her and every experience. Perhaps once she had the power to oust her possessors there would be nothing left, nothing but the mirrored fragments of the dispossessed.

The dim hall light, its precious minute spent, went out as they reached the fourth landing, and with a curse Max Dolan dropped her hand to hunt for his lighter. In the pitch-blackness, panic came over Christine. One hand still clung to the stair rail and instinctively she stepped backward.

"Wait a minute, I've got a match somewhere," Jackie's voice muttered.

Christine heard the sound of the purse being snapped open, the scrabbling about in keys and papers, as she tiptoed down the stairs swiftly. She heard the contents of the purse clinking, rolling as it fell on the stone floor, Jackie's giggle and Max's laughing rebuke. She was down one flight, then another, and then she heard Jackie's voice, "Hang on, Christine, we'll do this like Mount Everest. Just two more flights."

"Idiot," Jackie exclaimed. "That's my hand you've got."

She was down another flight now, panting, and no longer hushing her footsteps.

"Hey, Christine! What's the matter? Where are you going?" Max's voice echoed down the stone stairwell and Christine doubled her speed.

"Hush up, Max! Don't get the concierge on us now!" Jackie hissed and then Christine was out in the dark court again. Her ankle turned on the wet stones but she hobbled toward the entrance just as the concierge's door opened and the great tiger cat glided out to the fond clucking admonitions of his mistress.

"*Mademoiselle?*" barked the old lady as Christine limped past, peering out; then in a milder tone, "*Pardonnez-moi, mademoiselle —*"

"*La sortie, s'il vous plaît,*" Christine gasped and almost groaned with relief when the old crone, without protest, clicked a button that opened the mysterious wall once again and she was out on the dark street running toward the hazy lights that must be the river.

"Miss Lesley," she heard herself whispering as she ran, "Oh Miss Lesley, what can I do?"

Paris was round. No matter in which direction you walked you wound up where you started, and as if that was not frustrating enough, with the same thoughts seesawing in your head that had driven you out in the first place. Signposts meant nothing — the Samaritaine sign lighting up the Right Bank, the Tour Eiffel, the Lion, the heroic statue of Balzac, the pool in the Luxembourg Gardens, the Arc de Triomphe — these familiars reared up before you along the way not like milestones but like traveling companions who had started out with you and might drop off gently at their posts. Crossing bridges, back and forth, threading and braiding *rues* and *boulevards*, beguiled by one more little square, another *place*, you walked your mind away, postponed the answer, tramped out hope and regret, then you were back at your own post, falling into your place just as the Eiffel, the Lion, Balzac and the others had. Tomorrow you would start earlier and in the other direction, but the companions would be the same, looming suddenly before you like the Cheshire smile, then fading behind you, as the hours had, as the city itself had, for you had really seen nothing but the cloud of uncertainties ahead of you.

It was foolish of her to go again to the American Express. She expected no mail, and there was the danger of seeing Max Dolan again and trying to explain herself. But there she was, studying the bulletins again, looking at the un-

claimed mail, quailing before the clusters of Americans at the windows. She thought again of whether she dared cable her mother to send her money from her savings account, but dismissed the thought at once. They had been on such a delicate footing, Christine still prickling at her mother's failure to say goodbye and taking such pains to keep her letters from confessing her childishness; a sudden request for help out of blue would surely alarm the lady. She could pawn her watch or ring if she had any idea how to go about it. She edged up unconsciously toward the D window, as if merely pretending she could ask for Drummond mail would give her back her identity, and then, impatient with her helplessness, she turned around and saw Gordon.

He was leaning against the wall, smoking, and he had the relaxed air of someone who had been waiting a long time. His sandy freckled face was sunburned and his hair streaked the way it got when he raced with the top down. He looked taller and older out of uniform, and even though he needed a haircut and his topcoat was worn, he had a vague air of distinction. He wasn't looking at her, but she had a feeling he had seen her. Her first impulse was to speak to him and get it over with. She fought against a spontaneous pleasure in seeing him, always forgetting that he was an enemy. The best thing was to slip out past him with a group of girls just leaving. But they stopped right in front of Gordon to ask some question and there was no way for them to avoid each other.

"Well," she said, defiantly, "here we are."

He shot her a quick glance and looked away silently.

"You keep your hands in your pockets like a Private Eye in a bad movie," she said mockingly. "Aren't you going to pull out the handcuffs?"

"I was just giving you a chance not to see me," he said. "I'm not looking for you."

Christine studied his face suspiciously, looking for some sign of his usual mockery, and noting irrelevantly that his eyelashes and brows were sunburned almost white and that it was oddly appealing.

"After you forwarded that letter to me from here I thought there might be others," he said. "I came in on my weekend off to check."

"Was the letter important, then?" she asked.

"Not by the time I got it," he shrugged. "It was too late to do any good, but that's my life. What about some lunch?"

He would tell her what was happening at Miss Lesley's, she thought, following him up the steps, but in his maddening way he talked about nothing but restaurants as they walked down the street. It was drizzling as usual, and she suggested the Café de la Paix but he was set on his own little spot farther up on the Boulevard Haussmann.

"I suppose you're accustomed to Fouquet's or Prunier's with the gay international set," he said, leading her through a tiny bar to an almost empty dining room. As they sat down to a corner table Christine found herself looking cautiously over her shoulder, as if she expected Miss Lesley's disapproving face. She fought against an unreasoning

pleasure in being with someone from home, and against the insidious feeling of safety, reminding herself of how often the mere need for his sympathy had betrayed her. Out of uniform and away from their habitual meeting ground Gordon seemed more at ease in this little Paris restaurant than he ever did in Fairmount Village. It was strange that this was the first time they had ever been alone like this since the Pilot Ship and she felt a flash of resentment at the tacit restrictions Miss Lesley had put upon them all these years, when they might have been friends, enjoying occasional escapes, instead of allowing this wall to build between them. Miss Lesley was responsible for the wall, Christine thought, vigilantly preserving her as part of the Patterson property to be respected by the serfs as such. Without Miss Lesley she was still uneasily conscious of the wall, but Gordon appeared to consider it gone. His manner was casually confident, and in her present limp state she was torn between the desire for support and her inner counsel to resist surrender anywhere.

When she hesitated over the menu, confused as she always was now over whether she was ordering for Miss Lesley or for herself, he impatiently took over the ordering for both. Potage cressantières, a bottle of brouilly, lamb with flageolets, pears and port du Salut.

"So it's you who's been calling at my hotel," she said.

He looked honestly startled.

"How could I? I don't even know where you're staying," he said.

Detectives, then, Christine thought.

"The Madam got upset when she got your wire from Paris," he said. "Cousin John tried to pump me but all I knew was that you seemed about ready to flip when we left the villa."

"I did?" Christine exclaimed, vexed at his finding her so transparent.

Gordon poured the wine from the carafe and took a sip.

"I can always tell," he said. "I figured you'd snap at the chance to break away."

"How could you tell?" Christine demanded.

"Because I would have done it myself," he said. "I've watched you all these years, marking time, waiting for the chance to get Cousin John. When the Madam finally outfoxed you, I knew you'd do something."

"That wasn't it at all!" Christine blazed at him. "You think everything I ever do has something to do with a man. You don't know anything about me."

"Maybe I don't, but Miss Lesley does," he said. "She knows everybody's secrets. Nobody ever gets away from Miss Lesley because she knows too much. She knows you're waiting for Cousin John."

"Does she know about you and the girl in England?" Christine flung back at him.

"Nancy? Sure." He disarmed her by being candid. "She advanced me the money to pay for Nancy's divorce, but she knew Nancy wouldn't get one — not then. Oh sure, Madam's got us right in her pocket. If I quit, she stops looking after my brother in the sanitarium and his family. If you quit she stops paying your sister Jeanie's emergencies."

"My sister Jeanie?" Christine exclaimed. "What does Miss Lesley have to do with her?"

Gordon laughed.

"Our families figure we've got a good thing so they tap her for everything they need, like the Bank of England," he said. "They wouldn't let us quit her even if we could. She knows that."

Christine lifted her wine glass with a shaking hand and gulped.

"Even your dad got in on it when he found out you were with her," Gordon said. He signaled the waiter for another bottle of wine. "She sent him money someplace in South America."

Christine stared at him, unbelieving. Even if he were at his usual sport of needling her he wouldn't deliberately lie.

"Your father kept in touch with my father," he explained. "I saw the letters, that's how I knew, but don't blame your dad."

"Why didn't he come to me? I would have been glad to help him," Christine protested. "I've always wanted to find him — "

"He didn't want to get your mother down on him again," Gordon said. "He had a dirty deal from her to begin with."

"What do you mean?" Christine asked blankly.

Gordon filled her glass, silent for a moment.

"I never could believe you didn't know," he plunged finally. "It was the talk of Fairmount Village at the time, as your mother knew. Maybe that's why she always kept you tied to her apron strings, not letting you mix with the town

kids for fear you'd hear something. How Stoddard took up with her and squeezed out your father, using the other roomers as a cover-up, since he had a family in Albany."

Christine felt herself drained and numb. She reached for her glass again and swallowed. It tasted suddenly bitter. She must have turned white, for Gordon looked at her apprehensively.

"I don't see why it should be such a shock! You couldn't have grown up there in the same house without guessing there was some hanky-panky going on," he said harshly.

"It's not really a shock," Christine said shakily. "It's just like finding the blank sheet of paper is covered with invisible ink that springs out when you hold it a certain way. It's always been there but if you never held it to the light — "

In her mind fragments of memories fell into place like lost pieces in a jigsaw — the sound of whispers in Mr. Stoddard's bedroom, her mother's red-rimmed eyes when he was kept away by illness, the knowing look in villagers' eyes when she did his errands, the echoes in her dreams of what seemed lovers' quarrels, the way Mr. Stoddard's needs always came first in the Drummond house.

"I mean it was always in the back of my head, I guess," she went on, and then laughed a little hysterically. "But I never felt like looking at the back of my head. I suppose that was why she didn't mind my leaving home. She didn't need to pretend any more."

Gordon watched her doubtfully as she went on laughing, her hand to her mouth like a child with the giggles.

"I'm just thinking how silly I must have seemed," she stammered giddily. "But I really wasn't, don't you see, because what was the good of my facing the situation? The only way you can live is by looking in the other direction and sliding past, I mean, when there's nothing you can do and you don't understand anyway."

"Maybe so," Gordon said, but she saw it was the old Gordon, whose sport was spoiled if his victim surrendered, and he must tease it for livelier reaction. "That was why John Lesley wanted to get you away from there and asked Miss Lesley to look after you. He thought your mother's reputation in the village would have its effect on you. You were excitable, he said, and had to be protected from yourself."

Christine didn't speak. Excitable! She thought of the night she had crept into John Lesley's room and the deep color came back in her face.

"I used to think you knew all this and it made me mad for you to strut around tossing your head," Gordon said, observing the effect of his bluntness. "I realize now you were in the dark."

"If I was in the dark it was because I wanted to be," Christine said. She wondered why, if he had known so much, he hadn't told her before or why he felt it necessary to tell her now. It could only be that he could sense the finality of her plans and wanted to destroy what little courage she had left. Resentment gave her strength.

"Are you telling me all this just to see how much you can upset me?" she demanded.

"Do you think I'd lie?" Gordon shouted. "I only want you to know the facts so you see what you're doing. You're so damned afraid of facts. I'm only telling you to help you."

"You? Help me?" Christine said coldly. "How would you help me?"

Gordon threw down his fork angrily and poured more wine.

"Why wouldn't I?" he asked savagely. "Haven't we been in the same boat all these years? I told you I didn't come here to look for you, but that wasn't quite true. I wanted to warn you that Miss Lesley smelled a rat when the nurse reported you had left the villa without leaving word. She's considering detectives, again, to find you and bring you back so I wanted to get to you first."

"Why?" Christine cut in.

Gordon looked at her in exasperation.

"Because I wanted to keep you from making a mess of it, that's all," he said. "How did you think you were going to get along in Paris, anyway?"

"I expect to work," Christine said.

"Are you crazy? With all the Americans looking for jobs here? With all the red tape about labor permits, and maybe a bare starving salary if you do find something?"

"Actually, I intend to go back to New York," Christine said.

Gordon looked appeased.

"That's more like it. You were a fool not to stick it out till you got back, that's all," he said. "But now you've

struck you'd better act fast or you'll never make it, once the lady gets on the war path."

"What do you suggest?" Christine asked.

"I've got my car here," he said. "I thought I would drive out to the Villa Topaze to pick up our belongings. I'll arrange about the tickets so we can be in the clear before she can get to us."

"Tickets?" Christine repeated.

"New York," he said impatiently. "Isn't that where you want to be?"

"Yes, but — " she hesitated. "You said 'we.' "

"Certainly," he said. "Once the trap is sprung we might as well both go. It's easy for me to get another job, and I can fix you up. The world's full of old ladies needing company — what's the matter?"

"I was only thinking that it seemed cruel for both of us to be deserting Miss Lesley at once," Christine said, feeling old and beaten, but gathering her last bit of strength to disguise it. "Like a conspiracy."

"You didn't think it was cruel to desert her and me," Gordon exclaimed. At Christine's bewildered look he gave a mirthless laugh. "Don't pretend you didn't know I couldn't ever leave as long as you stayed there. You had me trapped just as Miss Lesley had me trapped in another way."

Christine studied the red tablecloth carefully, conscious of the complications of asking him to explain. Gordon, embarrassed by his own outburst, motioned the waiter for the check.

"It's tough for a man to have to stand around watching a girl like you throw her life away," he said uncomfortably. "First on your mother when she was only crazy about Stoddard. I knew how upset you were when she didn't say goodbye this trip — just because Stoddard wanted her to stick around Albany while he was sick — "

"I knew all that," Christine lied coldly.

"Anyway this is a chance for both of us," he said.

"What about your Nancy?" Christine asked, fending off direct answers. "After all she did write you. Wasn't that the letter I forwarded?"

"I waited too long for that letter," he said grimly. "So she did change her mind and want me back. I'd figured out my own answers while I waited. I'm staying where I belong and I advise you to do the same. Stop reaching for the moon."

"What do you mean?" Christine asked warily.

He made an impatient grimace, as if this was a question whose answer she surely knew by heart.

"You hung on till you found you couldn't get Cousin John, because Miss Lesley would never allow it," he said. "You found out she rates you with Cathy and the bellboys and — me. So you're going to run off and be independent — Where? How?"

"I told you I have my plans," Christine said stiffly. "As soon as I'm in New York — "

"You'd better not count on promises from those big shots that visit Miss Lesley," he advised her. "I'm the one that can help you, because what it comes down to is that we belong together and you know it."

He was pounding the table lightly with his fists as if he were nailing a lid on her cage, she thought. She felt wearied and crushed by him and his arrogant assumption that he was the only person who understood her and that she had no right to reject him. She rose to go, silently, and he followed her out to the street.

"Would a hundred thousand francs help you settle things?" he said reaching for his wallet.

"Thanks, I don't need money," Christine said.

He shrugged and replaced the bills in his pocket, then took her arm firmly and led her to a taxi, as if he were already in possession.

"Alexandria-Cherbourg," she told the taxi driver.

It didn't matter now if he knew where she was.

"I'll manage everything," he said. As if he knew, as everyone did, that all she needed was a change of masters. "I'll be at your hotel around five tomorrow."

She nodded. He saluted her briefly and stood watching as she drove off, then turned in the other direction and strode off. As soon as she felt it was safe Christine stopped the cab and got out. Her head was bursting with the new dimensions to her own problem, and a homesickness for the mother she hadn't known. She began to walk swiftly across the Rue Scribe trying to look like a person with a destination.

There are times when one is dead in the way radio tubes are dead; a light goes on feebly to show that a message is being given but there is no response, nothing is received.

Christine had walked for hours, across one bridge and back over the next, unconscious of the freezing rain. She must have been chilled to the skeleton by the December death-chill of Paris, but then she thought this was a city that smelled of death, the chill was the chill of ancient graves, graves of people who had died of love and loneliness; the icy fingers reached up through the cobbled pavements and the crumbling walls.

The most desirable city in the world, she reminded herself, saying the words out loud to make them real, but nothing was real. She could hear the squashing of her wet shoes on the pavement and thought the somebody-else's-feet in those shoes were frozen, but they went on trudging down the Rue de la Paix over side streets to the Rue Rivoli, back to another bridge, up another little street, down here, up there, slosh, slosh, with the lights of shops and taverns spilling into the gutters like overturned kegs of *vin gris*. It seemed to her she had been a wanderer in Paris for years, as if she could see the future stretched out, the years a row of diminishing lamps fading off in the distance. Already she was old, deserted by lives she had deserted, and she could feel her lips forming a bitter, aching smile, remembering that once these lights had spelled hope of freedom. It couldn't be all her own failure, she thought vehemently. A vision of years to come whirled before her, herself visible only when illuminated by her backgrounds, conscious only of the perpetual reach for identity, then drawing back at the revealed face. It was as if her own senses were beyond her means, locked in a merchant's window for her to press

her nose against knowing they were not for her — the promise of the misty boulevard lights, the stars over the black Seine, the murmuring girls in masquerade costumes fluttering by, even the smell from the bakery shop were not for her but for those others between the dream and herself.

Paris knew it, too, she thought, in the way Paris could sniff No-money, No-love, No-hope and then pounce on the unlucky. She knew that if she were to enter this bakery or that café, there would be suspicious silence; the smell of defeat was on her for these truffle hounds, and perhaps they could sense the hidden panic of insecurity, the choking fear of no-money ahead, and even though she was no mendicant, how soon would she be one, they would calculate, and she could see them clutching their cash registers, their rosaries, their smiles and their hearts lest some free cheer would leak out that would jeopardize the principle.

Sometimes she came within blocks of her hotel but each time she turned away automatically as if there lay the truth she did not want.

"Paris," she murmured determinedly, "the most beautiful city in the world. I am here and whatever happened about my mother or John is long ago and no truer for me now than it was then. Only Paris is real."

In the Place de la Concorde the nymphs leaped out of the fountain beside her, the Champs-Elysées spread far away twinkling in the twilight lights, and now that the rain had stopped the buildings glittered with a mysterious iridescence. She would remember this and the mechanical

rhythm of these passing pictures in years to come; they might have warmth and meaning for her when she was safe in some kinder city, loved and wanted. But now she was bewitched by aloneness, belonging neither to present or future, her past a lie. She refused to think of Gordon but she would not admit anything else in her mind, either. She felt drained of hope and all feeling, whatever might happen would not touch her, for it would only happen to the shell of garments she wore over the dummy frame. She should have coffee or a brandy, she thought dimly, forcing herself to look about her and see. But the scenes repeated before her eyes often that day could not register, the fleeting snapshots of Pernod sky changing to black above the Seine, the spacious bridge, the spangled Etoile, the spider web of the Eiffel against a gossamer cloud might be developed in color and depth someplace else, some other time, but now they were only a picture book for doll's eyes. Later the *fine à l'eau* in the Seine café was merely wetness in a sawdust mouth, and the voices of drinkers in the booth beside her were meaningless static.

Christine sat, huddled in her wet clothes, lighting cigarettes and putting them out after a puff, warming her hands on her coffee glass, swallowing one brandy after another purposefully, yet not knowing whether she wished to wake up her numb brain or anesthetize it completely. Patrons drifted out, Madame at the cash register and Monsieur at the bar made their closing preparations and waited stolidly for the lone customer to leave. A clock struck ten and Christine pulled out a handful of money from her

purse, puzzled over the check, and then got to her feet unsteadily. Outside she stood still, looking around for a clue to her whereabouts, more than half hoping she was lost. There was no mistaking the Louvre outlines in the distance, however, and she turned around with a sigh toward her own hotel.

Her steps lagged slower and slower and she found herself playing an old childish game of counting as if some miracle would have to happen when she got to twenty — no thirty — then forty — forty-five — forty-six — She was at the entrance by that time and there was nothing to do but go in. She was glad no one was at the desk, though she could hear Michel's voice in back somewhere. Only one light bulb was burning and it left the long hallway almost in darkness. It was ridiculous to wander alone all over the side streets of Paris unafraid and then shiver at a chair's shadow in this safe haven. She thought she heard Michel call her name and she stood for a minute, then tiptoed on toward the stairs, and crept up slowly, like a guilty daughter home late from the ball. She wouldn't miss the Hotel Alexandria-Cherbourg, she reflected, softly unlocking her door, no matter where she might be tomorrow night.

Odd that her table lamp should be lit, considering Madame Juvel's economies, but in the same instant she noted this Christine saw the figure in the straight chair. The fedora and thick shoulders in tweed seemed masculine but when the square sallow face turned toward her she felt a scream of fearful recognition rising in her throat.

"Miss Lesley!" she gasped. "It's — why it's only you."

Nothing to be in a panic about. The cognacs and the meeting with Gordon had unnerved her, that was all, and the sense of being trapped in an old nightmare would surely go when she could get her breath. But the yellow rag-doll with the piercing little black eyes seemed a sinister caricature of Miss Lesley, the monster shadow that had lurked behind her all day long, waiting to spring.

"I've been waiting for you, Christine," Miss Lesley said, without moving. "I've been here for hours."

"I'm sorry," Christine said limply.

"John found out where you'd gone and I came straight here," Miss Lesley said in a dull monotone as if she had rehearsed her words carefully to conceal all agitation. "You were very inconsiderate — incredibly inconsiderate, but we'll speak of that later. Now, if you'll please pack your bag, we can be on our way back to the Villa Topaze before midnight. Gordon is off duty but I have a rented car waiting."

Christine took a step toward the armoire almost automatically, then stood stock-still.

"I'm not going back, Miss Lesley," she said.

The stillness that followed the barely whispered words was more ominous than any outburst. Miss Lesley got to her feet slowly, supporting herself by the table.

"You really meant to desert me, then," she said. "You knew how helpless I am without you, and you deliberately waited for the chance to hurt me, leave me stranded — "

"But you had told me you didn't need me," Christine

interrupted. "It was you who left, Miss Lesley, you said you were going on without me — "

"Did you think I was going to hand you over to John Lesley? Did you think I have trained and protected you all these years just to provide John Lesley with a little holiday sport?"

"I don't know what you mean," Christine murmured.

Miss Lesley's careful control was cracking. The beaded fringe of the table lamp danced as her trembling hand grasped the table edge and her voice shook.

"Oh, I'm not such a fool that I didn't know how you felt about him, but I trusted his common sense," she said. "Then when I telephoned him from the villa he said he'd sent his wife off to London so she wouldn't be 'jealous of Tina.' He was so longing for our visit, he said, and didn't want any complications. I realized then I didn't dare risk taking you."

"You were sure I had no resistance," Christine said, her cheeks burning, and her fists clenched tight to keep back the wild impulse to shout out "Oh don't let's put anything in words! Let's not say whatever it is there is to say!"

"There was your mother and Stoddard," Miss Lesley said sharply. "You would have been running true to form, taking a married lover, breaking away from me, the only person who loves you. I wasn't going to let it happen, do you hear? I wasn't — "

She stopped, short of breath, wheezing inarticulate words, reminding Christine dully that it was the signal for an injection for asthma, the usual physical accompaniment

of her rages. At other times the girl would have anticipated the need, springing to the older woman's aid; for a brief second both were conscious of the deliberately missed cue, Christine rigid in her rebellion, Miss Lesley staring at her, baffled and indignant that the old appeal had not worked.

"Supposing it was more than a little holiday sport?" Christine said. "What makes you so sure that's all there could be between John Lesley and me?"

"What else could there be?" Miss Lesley panted angrily. "I've helped him and he's done too well to risk losing it all now."

The other woman's trembling anger helped Christine to control her own rising fury but the effort took all her strength. When she could finally command her voice it was scarcely audible.

"You really expected me to go on staying with you for no reason except that you're Lesley Patterson. I wonder how you can want me in the same house, when you have gone to all this trouble to save your cousin John from me — as if I was some odious disease. As if I could only ruin a man's career. As if I wasn't fit for anyone in your family. If that was so, what did you want with me — someone to hate?"

"Stop!" Miss Lesley's hand suddenly cracked across Christine's face, and as Christine stepped back, stunned, the other hand caught her on the other cheek, and suddenly hard blows were raining about her face with a maniacal force. Just as suddenly the attack stopped; Miss Lesley

collapsed against the bed, her face crumpling into tears. Christine could feel the blood flowing from her nose and mechanically reached for the bathtowel to stop it.

"Oh what have I done? How could I hurt you?" Miss Lesley moaned, rocking back and forth on the bed, with her hands over her eyes. "How could you think I was saving John? It was you I was saving because you belong to me. Do you think I could let someone snatch you away — even John Lesley — after all the years we've had? How can you say the word 'hate,' Tina? I've protected you and guarded you as if you were my own self. Yes, you were my other self, the young beautiful self that I never was. Why don't you understand that, Tina? You've always understood."

"I'm not sure I did," Christine said, her low voice lost in a fresh burst of sobs from Miss Lesley. She was dizzy, more from the shock of the other's attack than from its actual force, and her bruised cheek smarted under the trickle of blood. If she had had the strength she would have gotten as far away from her guest as possible but her knees were weak and she slid into the chair by the bed. Miss Lesley mopped her tears and turned toward her, eyes dilating at sight of the blood.

"How could I have hurt you, Tina, you know I would never have done it but I couldn't stand your leaving me! You've got to see that!" She reached pleading arms out to Christine, then dropped them, incredulous at being denied the old comforting.

"I'd made you my whole life, Tina!" she whimpered. "I

saved you from your mother and from all the stupid men who tried to steal you, and then from my own John Lesley. John was mine, too, don't forget. I made his life just as I made yours and I would have kept him with me, but I had to choose. I knew what would happen if he stayed so I let him go. I had to save you."

"What made you think I wanted to be saved?" Christine asked stonily, avoiding Miss Lesley's imploring eyes. "For what was I being saved?"

Miss Lesley, searching in Christine's white, stern face in vain for some sign of the old affection, sighed.

"You can be very hard, Tina. I don't say ungrateful. I have no respect for gratitude. But kindness! You could at least be kind." Her lips trembled again and the tears began to well up. "I've always been ill, plain — yes, ugly, as Father always told me — " Christine recognized the familiar old appeal and braced herself as the other sobbed on, "Do you think any man ever wanted me in my whole life? But I was never jealous of you. I loved to see men's eyes light up at the sight of you. I knew how they desired you, and I loved to punish them by snatching you away from them. I knew what I was doing, Tina, and I knew it was best. You were happy with me and I wouldn't let anyone spoil it. Oh Tina, my dear child, tell me you forgive my hurting you — please."

"I forgive you," Christine said quietly. "That was for the best, too."

She went over to the washbowl and bathed her face. It surprised her that there were less bruise marks than she

had thought. It surprised her, too, that the ever-watchful Madame Jouvel had not heard the strange sounds coming from the room, especially now that Miss Lesley's sobs were getting louder as if she was working up to one of her major spells. Strange she should feel only a weary exasperation accompanied by a deep sense of shame. She forced herself to go back toward the bed. Miss Lesley had slumped back on the pillows, shaking with frightened sobs.

"You must do something for me, Tina," she gasped. "The medicine's in my bag. Rub my head with ice or cologne or whatever it is you do. Please, please, Tina, hold on to me, help me."

"Be quiet," Christine ordered. "I'll take your things off."

She pulled off the coat and covered her with it, and loosened her blouse, then pulled off her shoes. Miss Lesley's face kept working piteously, her eyes begging, and sometimes a trembling hand reached out for her then drew back as Christine flinched. Christine found the bottle of sedatives in the handbag, and Miss Lesley's mouth opened obediently like a young robin's. Just then there was an ominous knock on the door. Christine froze, then reminded herself that it need not be Madame Jouvel protesting; people always pounded on doors in Paris as ominously as if they were the Gestapo.

"What is it?" she called out.

"Telephone, Miss Drummond," Michel's voice answered. "You can use the extension in the hall."

It might be Gordon, she thought with relief. She closed the door, glad that the darkness of the corridor hid her bruises, and followed Michel to the telephone.

"Tina?" a man's voice said urgently. "This is John Lesley."

For a minute the sound of his voice so overwhelmed her that she could not speak. Finally she got command of herself.

"She's here in my room, John," she said quite calmly. "You'd better come."

"I'll be there within the hour," he said and there was nothing more to say except neither hung up, as if the connection must not be broken.

"Tina?" his voice said finally.

"Yes, John," she said. "I'm here."

For another moment they hesitated and then she heard his receiver click. She hung up and walked slowly back to her room. When she opened the door she did not even look at the lump of tweed and blanket on the bed, but poured a glass of brandy from the bottle on the desk and sat down to sip it, her back to the bed, staring into space.

She was dimly aware that there were things that should be done before John Lesley arrived, but Christine sat motionless, her only feeling the throb of pain in her bruised face and body. She should inform the desk downstairs, she thought, that a doctor would be calling during the night on her sick guest, and she should do something about her own disheveled appearance, but all energy seemed drained from her. She told herself that in a few moments she would be facing John, but the idea seemed incredible, as incredible as Miss Lesley's presence and the attack of only

an hour ago. She must have gone into a delayed shock for she heard nothing when he came into the room, and only blinked back to consciousness at the touch of a man's hand on her wrist.

"You'll be all right, Tina," John Lesley said.

She couldn't quite believe that he was there, his blue eyes smiling anxiously at her, but suddenly she was happy.

"You have a mustache," she said idiotically. "I didn't know."

He laughed and laid a finger gently on her cheek.

"Tell me about this," he said.

Christine nodded toward the bed silently. He followed her gaze thoughtfully to the motionless figure of Miss Lesley. Then he went to the washbasin in the corner and dampened a fresh towel.

"I've given her a shot," he said. "I've sent for a nurse to spend the rest of the night with her. The manager is arranging other rooms for you and me. Tomorrow morning we'll see what's to be done. It looks like a slight stroke."

He was quietly bathing her bruises as he talked, and Christine closed her eyes, conscious of his touch, thankful for any calamity that had brought him there. Michel rapped on the door, announcing the arrival of the nurse, a large blond Prussian general of a woman who took over without further ado. Rooms were ready for Miss Drummond and the doctor across the hall, Christine gathered a few night things and left without daring or caring to look at Miss Lesley. She was glad of the economical lighting of the hall so that Michel did not stare at her as he led the way. As a

matter of fact the poor man was in a state of frenzied confusion, having just retired for a midnight snack and bottle in the kitchen when Dr. Lesley had roused him, then being drawn into a battle with his wife Marie for ordering her to prepare the rooms, and finally having Madame Jouvel herself rear up in curlers and nightcap, royal purple dressing gown and night creams, demanding how much the guest had bribed him for this extra service. Muttering defiance to female domination Michel flung open the door for Christine and pulled himself together to bow before the doctor respectfully. It was fortunate that John Lesley had arrived before news of a sick guest had time to throw the staff into the outraged hysterics such news invariably causes in France. Miss Lesley's own visit and admission to Christine's room had been facilitated by her arriving in an enormous rented Rolls, and by her plain, tweedy appearance always associated with county gentry. Later John Lesley's authoritative manner had stunned Michel into service, but before tomorrow night the quarreling over the tips would be submerged in common indignation that Sickness, regardless of tips, had extracted unparalleled sacrifices from the whole staff, and for this the American young lady must certainly be blamed.

Christine sat down on the bed in her new room, a tiny cell. It did have the advantage of running water, she saw, in case her vague nausea became irrepressible. She pressed her hot forehead against the cold brass bedstead and it felt better. After a few moments she realized that she felt more at peace than she had for months. Probably because

she was caught, she thought dimly; being caught left no decisions necessary or possible. But no, she reminded herself, she was not the one who was caught, after all. It was Miss Lesley who was caught. And the heavenly sense of peace, in spite of the stinging pain in her wounds, was because John Lesley was here and that was the end of everything.

He came in without knocking presently, carrying the bottle of cognac. He had been too busy instructing the nurse and arranging for tomorrow's plans to remove his overcoat, but he did so now, dropping it on the bed before he sat down. He poured their drinks silently.

"I think I was already a little drunk," Christine said. "That's why it didn't hurt so much. I'd been walking all over, trying to think, and when I saw her it seemed a nightmare. I was scared enough just seeing her crouching there — so rigid and still, like a wild thing ready to get me. Then when she flew at me I was paralyzed, just thinking she's going to kill me and there's nothing I can do."

"When I found she'd left the hospital I was afraid of some crack-up, that's why I followed her," John said. "But nothing like that. Poor Tina!"

"It wasn't the beating, it was the shock," Christine explained wearily. "I could understand the physical outburst. But there was her face so filled with hate . . . and the terrible things she was saying . . . "

She put her hands to her ears, wincing at the memory.

"As if she was some tyrant punishing a runaway slave. As if she owned me. I wonder that I never saw it before.

I would never have stayed with her this long except for — "

She hesitated. He looked away from her.

"I know," he said. "You knew I wanted you there. I liked to think of you being there safe with Lesley. I'd gotten terribly tied up with Lesley, too, and it was an increasing responsibility — "

"You needed me as a buffer," Christine said.

"I was thinking of you first," he said. "You must have known I wanted you protected."

Christine shook her head, smiling a little sadly "You and Miss Lesley saving me! No. You thought my being there would leave you freer," she said without rancor. "You knew I would always look after your interests. No one else would get a chance to take your place with Miss Lesley."

He was startled.

"You can't believe I was such an opportunist as that, Tina, dear girl!" he expostulated, flushing.

"Not consciously," Christine said. "But I do seem to have been sort of a game for both of you."

"If you felt we were using you, why did you stay all these years?" he asked quietly.

She did not answer. He put his hands on her shoulders, obliging her to look up at him.

"Didn't it occur to you I wanted you there because it seemed a way of keeping you on ice for me?" he demanded. "All the time I thought of coming back — "

"I stayed on ice for you," Christine murmured, still smiling at him a little. "I would have frozen waiting, wouldn't I, since other things were too easy for you?"

His hands dropped again.

"If you mean I'm not strong, I suppose it's true. Lesley made it easy for me, then passed me on to my wife. Do you think I'm not a slave, too?" he said bitterly. "Other people plan for me. My life has been beautifully arranged for me without a struggle."

"You would never have come back," Christine said. "There would always have been something easier."

He shook his head, looking away from her direct gaze.

"Perhaps," he answered. "Beautiful arrangements would have been made for me by my father-in-law or by Lesley."

"I seem to see everything very clearly," Christine said. "That's one thing she did for me tonight. Like a bomb blasting out the truth. It's all clear, but I wish it wasn't."

"I'm sorry," he said.

He filled their glasses.

"I'm afraid it was my asking for you that set her off," he said. "Then she found you'd left the Villa Topaze. Oh Tina, my dear, I've made a mess of everything for you. Wheedling you to stay with Lesley, letting you in for this. God knows what she'll do when she finds you won't come back to her. Of course you won't."

Christine shrugged.

"I don't know," she said. "I know myself better now, and nothing seems to matter."

Her hair had fallen over her shoulders and she pushed it back impatiently from her white face. He watched her, waiting for her to accuse him in some way but she said nothing.

"You feel I sold you down the river," he ventured slowly. "You looked on me as the big hero and now you think I took advantage of your feelings for my convenience, letting you in for something you hadn't bargained for. I know. But Tina, darling, credit me for not trying to make love to you when I saw how you felt. It took all my strength to save you from your own self, but do give me credit for that much."

He was surprised to hear Christine burst into laughter that was almost derisive. He was embarrassed by her cool, searching gaze.

"I'm afraid I have always credited myself for that, John," she said, infinitely polite.

"I only meant that night you came to my room — " he stammered.

She smiled at him sweetly.

"I was looking for kindness and sympathy," she said, "which you gave me."

He gave her a startled glance and reddened. Then he recovered himself with a wry smile and got to his feet.

"Sometimes a man's vanity gets mixed up with his hopes," he said. "Let's call it sentimentality. You'll forgive that."

He picked up his coat on the bed beside her and turned to go. With his hand on the doorknob he hesitated. In another minute, if she did not speak, he would be gone and another door would be closed for her. It seemed to her doors were always closing before her. But even were they opening, she thought angrily, she would be retreating in

panic, ever afraid of her own decisions. There must be a moment like a last chance café, when you have to seize what was left of the dream or count as lost the long years you had lived by it. Her eyes turned toward John Lesley. He was quick to read the question and the surrender.

"Can't you see it has to be, Tina?" he whispered, taking her in his arms. "If it's to say goodbye. Even if it's only goodbye."

It would be goodbye, her mind answered dreamily from some far-off planet. But at least this time it would be she herself who was closing a door and that knowledge would give her new power.

"I might have guessed she'd find some way to keep you with her," Gordon said moodily. "Even if she had to have a stroke to do it. You can't win."

He had arrived at the hotel at midday and Christine had hurried him out to a café down the street to explain matters.

"You don't have to give up your own plans just because of this," she told him, knowing what he would say.

"No, we're both in this together, now," he replied. Then he pointed to her bruised cheek, only partly camouflaged by the scarf she wore, and burst out irritably, "How can you be willing to stay with her after that? What kind of hold does she have on you that you have to stand that kind of treatment?"

"I've told you," Christine said patiently. "When I planned leaving her it was because she could do well enough

without me. But now she's sick and needs me. I couldn't — don't you see?"

"What if she goes berserk again?" he demanded. "Supposing this paralysis is only temporary and she gets out of hand again? How can you handle her? And why do you want to?"

Christine got up abruptly.

"Let's go," she urged. "There's someone I don't want to see."

Annoyed at having his queries unanswered and at the new calm secretiveness in Christine's manner, Gordon rose too. A dark bearded young man had emerged from the small backroom and came toward them, smiling.

"Our vanishing beauty," he said, saluting Christine. He gave Gordon a sweeping glance, and directed a knowing, crooked smile at Christine, as if aha-so-this-was-your-problem-and-now-it's-fixed. She introduced Gordon to Max Dolan hurriedly, mindful of the abrupt manner she had left him last time, and conscious, too, of his understanding look at her discolored cheek. Lovers' quarrel complete with blows, his smile said, now smoothed over.

"I'm sorry I left you so suddenly that night," she apologized. "I remembered I had to meet someone."

Gordon stood aside scowling into space, with Max stealing curious looks at him.

"You stirred up the old witch of a concierge, that was the trouble," Max said. "We'd managed to pry open the door but she got up there and put us out after you left. I had to give up the kodak but I did swipe a stack of photo-

graphs Jackie wanted. I'm going to try to sell them to a news syndicate now."

He whipped out a cardboard briefcase and took some photographs from it.

"Jackie specializes in photographs of men," he explained to Gordon who glanced at the pictures impatiently. "The Aga Khan, a Chinese student, a watchman at the Louvre, a flic, the American Ambassador, Beaverbrook eating a sandwich, a Hindu princeling — I'll pick up a few bucks for them."

"Jackie catches some interesting expressions," Christine said politely.

Max laughed.

"She catches the same expression in all of them," he said delightedly. "Don't you see it? They all look scared to death afraid the photographer is going to rape them on the spot, and don't think Jackie wouldn't. The editor, when he uses them, will say the subject shows worry over his country's crisis, or some such nonsense, but he's really just scared that Jackie is going to fling herself on him. Isn't that wonderful?"

Christine wished him luck in his sales and promised she would drop in the Deux Magots at the usual hour in a day or two. She was uncomfortably aware that Gordon was displeased at the stranger's familiarity, realized that Max, unperturbed, was angling to attach himself to them, and was relieved to get away.

"Where do you pick up men like that?" Gordon asked, as they walked away. "I suppose he represents the great

free life you have been missing all these years. I don't understand you. You seem to be on chummier terms with him than you ever were with any other man. And why did you tell him you'd be seeing him in a day or two when you'll be gone?"

Christine sighed impatiently.

"It's a way of being here, don't you see?" she said. "They'll be expecting me to come in the door and it will make me feel that I might almost be here, living that queer life. I mean, I'll be back maybe in Fairmount with Miss Lesley but part of me will be walking in the café door."

She expected Gordon to give a snort of disgust at this capricious fancy but he was silent, and when she looked at him she caught him studying her with a kind of puzzled pity.

"You don't need to look sorry for me," she said sharply.

"I was just thinking you never seem able to do anything you really want to do," he said. "You like dreaming about it better than doing. You're afraid."

Christine stood still, clutching his arm, and staring at him wonderingly. It struck her as miraculous that this sullen, sardonic young man should be able to read her better than she could read herself. The exactness of his point made her want to cry.

"It's true, I am afraid," she confessed. "I'm afraid the real thing will fall short, so I go on with the dream."

She felt a wave of warm affection when Gordon laughed. It was reassuring to have him press her hand under his arm.

"You do see things," she accused him, "even though you

pretend to be obtuse. You see things about me, for instance."

"Because we're the same kind of people," he retorted shortly and the thought brought back old grievances. He let her hand fall away and scowled down at the pavement. "You never admit the simplest facts to yourself, and then when you bump into them they knock you out. If you'd admitted that you and I belonged together, wanted the same things out of life in our own way, it would have saved both of us a lot of godawful loneliness."

"I did know, Gordon, but I couldn't — " Christine cried out, unwilling to let the lovely warmth between them vanish again into the old hostility.

"She let you hang on to her world by your fingernails," he said. "You didn't even have the guts to make the most of that, either, always half in and half out, mooning after John Lesley. I'll bet he's the one who sold you the idea of going back to her."

"Somebody has to go back with her and I want to go back to America, anyway," Christine said, evading his accusation.

"It saves him the trouble of taking her," Gordon said. "He doesn't want to spare time from that cushy life over here. He'd rather pass the buck to you, knowing what she did to you. Haven't you got any pride?"

Christine was scarlet from his angry thrusts, but she was not resentful, only eager to win Gordon's good opinion again.

"You have to care about somebody to have pride in the

way you mean," she said carefully. "First I loved Miss Lesley, then I began seeing through her and fearing the way she was closing up my life, and then I hated her. I hated her so much it burned out all feeling. You feel superior to people when you have no feeling about them. Having no fear or love of her I can go back, because there's nothing she can do to me now."

Gordon was silent.

"But you don't have to go back," Christine told him, anxiously. "You can go ahead with all the plans you made."

"Sure," he said. "Oh sure. Only you know if you go back I go back with you."

"Oh please," Christine sighed happily.

Gordon was on her side at last. It was very strange that she should feel free and happy with Gordon, more than she had with anyone else in the world, when last night she had made another man her lover. It was as if John Lesley's making love to her as she had wished for so long was like Miss Lesley's outburst, blasting away the fantasies that chained her.

There was packing to do, cables to be sent, and Gordon was meeting Mrs. Rogers, the nurse, at the station and taking her to the hotel where John had already installed her until she was able to sail. Gordon walked back with Christine to the Alexandria-Cherbourg to pick up her belongings and check out. At the desk Michel informed her that Dr. Lesley had telephoned her from the Meurice.

"Maybe he's decided to sail back with her," Gordon suggested.

Christine shook her head serenely, conscious of his eyes watching her reaction. She wondered uneasily if he guessed what had happened, but then assured herself that even a man with Gordon's keen perception would never understand that a woman could free herself of an obsession by surrendering to it.

"He'd never do that," she said. "I don't think we'll see John Lesley in Fairmount again — " And then she laughed, with one of her mother's shrewdly practical afterthoughts, "Until he has to come over to claim his share of the estate."

She was thinking like her mother again, she realized, and it made her ache with homesickness.

Fairmount Village was buried in deep snow when they arrived at dusk. The bleak new neon-lit business blocks, the acres of "project" homes, the parking lots and supermarket were transformed into pictures of long long ago, old Christmas cards and Valentines in the Patterson attic, Christine thought, eagerly peering out the car window. She had not dreamed she would be so glad to be back, but it seemed to her she had been away for years, a lifetime. Nor had she foreseen her impatience as the three cars, Miss Lesley's ambulance with the nurse and doctor, Gordon and the gardener with the luggage, she in the small car with the smaller pieces, inched slowly up the winding icy roads to the Patterson house. What if she had doomed herself never to return, she asked herself in a panic? She tried to glimpse the house through the snow-laden trees, as if it were filled with nothing but happy memories.

When the house, illuminated brilliantly for the occasion, was finally upon them, she could not put aside the notion that the lonely, hungering Christine of old would be waiting to welcome the new Christine, as happy to be back as she had been to go. Mrs. Duffy, Cathy and the dogs clamored greetings from the doorway, their voices commiserating over Miss Lesley's need for the wheelchair, then bubbling up again in the excitement. Miss Lesley had recovered her speech to some degree, but her mind wandered and her physical movements were feeble, exaggeratedly so in Christine's opinion, skeptical of the constant bids for pity.

"Did you really mean it when you telegraphed to fix your old room for the nurse and to give you the Strawberry Room?" Cathy asked her in a low tone as the others were settling Miss Lesley in her bedroom upstairs.

Christine nodded.

"Miss Lesley won't like it, I'm afraid," Cathy said. "I did as you said but you know she likes to think you're right there so she can sleep. You won't be able to hear her."

"The nurse will," Christine said, calmly. Then as Cathy looked puzzled she added, "I've decided it's better for me to have my nights my own. Besides we mustn't let her depend too much on any one person."

Cathy saw the sense of that but later she was disturbed to hear Miss Lesley's voice calling out for Tina while Christine was having her dinner. Miss Drummond didn't jump right up as she always used to do, Cathy reported to Mrs. Duffy, but went right on eating and said she'd look

in on the Madam when she went to bed herself, unless the Madam gave up and went to sleep. She had things of her own to do, Miss Drummond had said, such as telephoning her mother.

Wherever she turned there were other Christines waiting, wide-eyed girls, eager girls, lonely girls, disillusioned girls. Hurrying up the path to her mother's cottage the next afternoon, having left Miss Lesley to her nap and the nurse's care, Christine thought of all the desires and hopes the little house had sheltered, the young Christine about to conquer the world, seeing the gates opening before her but only to close her in. All the bitterness that had been smoldering against her mother had vanished, and she knew the exact moment it had gone — the time Gordon told her she had been in love with Mr. Stoddard. The idea that her mother had been burdened all these years with a secret love filled her with pity, for her life too had been fed on a secret love. Of course that love should come first, of course she could never fail it, even if she must fail her daughter.

Christine thought her mother must suspect that her secret was known and forgiven by the extraordinary warmth of her embrace, but since Mrs. Drummond had never sensed her daughter's withdrawal from her or felt the need of forgiveness she merely laughed at a dear silly girl who could meet fine people all over the world and still be foolish enough to miss her stupid old mother. They talked of Miss Lesley's illness, of Jeanie's family, of the rumor that the government wanted the Patterson estate for some

kind of institution and whether Miss Lesley would consent as amicably as her lawyers predicted. Especially since there was no prospect of John Lesley coming back to Fairmount —

"But you haven't mentioned John once!" her mother bethought herself. "Didn't you see him? Is he doing well?"

"He has a mustache," Christine said irrelevantly. "Yes, he is doing well, too well to leave. You used to say Miss Lesley was spoiling him, getting him used to money and an easy life, and you were probably right."

"Such a nice lad at the first," Mrs. Drummond reflected. "Mr. Stoddard used to warn me the boy had a yen for you, but I knew he was looking for bigger fish, even if he didn't know it himself."

Christine hugged her mother, always beguiled by her candor.

"And Mr. Stoddard?" she asked.

"I meant to write you but it was such a long story," her mother said, drawing a deep breath as if for a difficult confession. "He hasn't been well — his heart, you know — and then his wife left him, stripping him of every penny, mind you, except what he makes and some stock he had in my name, and — well, the sensible thing for him was to move here, where his things were, you see, and so — "

"That was the sensible thing, of course," Christine assured her, amused at the flush mounting her mother's throat.

"He's always been so good to us, such a Rock of Gibraltar I've always said, and I'm glad to repay him by looking after him — you remember how kind he was — "

"Mother, don't worry," Christine interrupted gently. "I understand. It's too bad you couldn't have been together all these years."

Mrs. Drummond, who had seemed on the verge of breaking into tears, looked stunned for a split second, then beamed joyously.

"You're such a good sensible girl, Tina," she said. "I've been so worried and afraid of how you might misjudge me, and I tried so hard to keep you girls from knowing. But I was so alone, and he was such a fine man, such a Rock of Gibraltar."

"You're the Rock of Gibraltar," Christine replied.

Her mother was so overjoyed at being relieved of her burden of guilt that she wanted to talk of nothing but Mr. Stoddard, the fine things he had done and said, the nobility of his character in spite of his equivocal position, the thousand and one ways he had made life magical for her. She talked on, as she must have talked to herself for many years, justifying her love, proud of it but obliged to keep it hidden.

"You were the one I was most afraid of, Tina," she confessed. "You always had your head in the clouds, expecting so much from everyone. That was why you never noticed things, I guess, the way Jeanie did. Jeanie knew from the time she was a child, but you know how Jeanie is, not at all like you. She just takes things for granted and pays them no mind."

"But how could Jeanie guess?" Christine wanted to know.

Mrs. Drummond pondered.

"I think it began when she came to me one morning and said, 'Here's your hankie, Mummy. It was under Mr. Stoddard's pillow.' Later she used to ask me why Mr. Stoddard didn't divorce his wife and have me come to Albany to live. She was a funny one, slow in some ways, and too wise in others, but I didn't have to worry about her the way I did about your finding out, even though you were older."

They were sitting in the kitchen, having coffee in the breakfast nook, and it was wonderful to be friends again. Mrs. Drummond went on happily pouring out the long buried secrets, relieved and absolved by her daughter's deep interest.

"It was natural I should love Mr. Stoddard," she reflected. "I think it was because he was always so busy. When he first took the room he'd come in and work on his papers half the night, hardly speaking to anyone, then be off at crack of dawn. I couldn't help but admire a busy man like that; no woman can. Your father had been such a great one for lying in bed all day — oh yes, I know newspaper men are different — but there's something so exasperating about never being able to make the bed, never being able to wash the coffeepot because you had to keep it hot for him."

"I guess a man likes a busy woman in the same way," Christine observed.

Her mother nodded her head emphatically.

"Exactly! Mr. Stoddard's wife just lay around all day, I understand, never lifting a finger, nagging at him to go on

vacations and tours with her. But what really started everything was something I know you'll understand, Tina."

"I'd better put on some more coffee," Christine said.

"You girls were tiny and I'd already started letting rooms, because I never could count on your father's help and I needed every penny," Mrs. Drummond rushed on. "It was a hot August night, late, and I was still working in the kitchen. I'd put the washing to soak, and I had an old torn apron round my head sealing up jars of corn pickle to take to the market in the morning. I knew Mr. Stoddard was in his room working. The light was on and I heard papers rattling, so I figured he was working out a speech or paper. It was company knowing somebody else was working hard while I was. Then I heard him speak to me and there he was, standing in the kitchen door in his shirtsleeves, with a pencil and paper and what do you think he said?"

She drank the last of her coffee, handed the cup to Christine and without waiting for an answer went on with shining eyes.

" 'What's the line that comes after this, Mrs. Drummond,' he said, *'The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon Turns ashes — or it prospers* — and then what?' Tina, do you realize what that meant to me? Mind you, there I was up to my neck in kitchen work, hardly having said a word to the man before, but he actually took for granted I knew poetry! I wasn't just a drudge for him, I was a woman who knew the Rubaiyat!"

Tears of sympathetic excitement filled Christine's eyes, as her mother wiped hers at the memory.

"I was so touched, Tina. I just looked at him and I could have cried at the compliment. And I did know the line — I've forgotten it now — *'and anon, Like snow upon the Desert's dusty Face'* — and so on — your father was always reciting things like that — but at that minute I felt I would do anything in the world for Mr. Stoddard. That's what love is, Tina, having the person expect something beautiful from you no matter how plain your life is."

Now that she had explained her own situation and been reassured by Christine's sympathetic attention, Mrs. Drummond was able to show her old-time interest in her daughter's life. Perhaps there was a beau, someplace, though a girl would be foolish to give up a fine berth like hers for a man, no matter who he was. How serious was Miss Lesley's condition, and did it make the job harder for her?

"She's almost helpless. It's better to know I'm really needed," Christine answered. "I handle all her correspondence and manage the relatives and the accounts. I couldn't have endured it any more if it was just the silly game of filling in the days, keeping everything so dreadfully personal. Pretending to like her — "

Mrs. Drummond was shocked.

"You mean you don't like Miss Lesley any more?"

Christine shook her head without explaining, though her mother waited curiously.

"It's just a job now," she said. "That's the way I want it."

It was time to go back. There were a hundred more things to talk about, but it was enough to know that they

were together again and the chasm between them had been bridged. Her mother repeated again how overjoyed she was not to be misjudged by Tina and could only scold herself for her own doubts.

"I understand myself a little better, that's all," Christine answered and kissed her mother goodbye.

Gordon had the car waiting at the head of the lane when she reached the gate and she got in the seat beside him. He put the fur rug around her knees snugly and lit a cigarette for her. Instead of turning the car toward the mountains he took the highway in toward the village center past the supermarket, pausing at a machinery shop on a corner.

"The shop I used to work in," he announced briefly.

"Brummer's," Christine nodded. "I know."

"Not Brummer's any more," Gordon said. "MacNeil's. I just bought it."

Christine bent toward him for explanation.

"You're leaving us then?"

"Later on," he said. "Right now Brummer will keep it going and I'll come down in my spare time to fool around with some ideas. It's what I've been aiming at all along, owning my own shop so I could work out ideas the big people won't risk till they see the first experiments."

He was more excited than she had ever seen him.

"I could have done it a year or two ago," he said, "but I was afraid Miss Lesley would stick her nose in it, wanting to help out, or send her lawyers around to give me advice, and that would have spoiled it. Now she's out of the picture and by the time she gets back on her feet — which I very much doubt — I'll be on my own."

"I don't see how you stood chauffering Miss Lesley all this time when you had these wonderful plans ahead," Christine said.

He started the car up the hill once more.

"You don't care what you do for a living so long as it doesn't shut you off from the big plans," he answered. "I've known what I wanted as long as I can remember, and thinking about it, studying ways to get there, all that acts like a drug. Makes you forget the regular everyday trials."

That was the way to be, Christine thought admiringly.

"What other plans have you always had?" she asked.

He drove in silence for a moment.

"You," he said presently.

Christine sat up straight.

"You acted as if you hated me," she said, "not even friendly until lately."

"I did hate you part of the time," he admitted. "When you ran around for John Lesley and when you let yourself get buried in other people's lives just because you're softhearted. Every time you like somebody you think you've got to be their slave, and I wanted to shake you."

"Maybe you just wanted me to be your slave," she suggested.

He was nettled.

"Certainly not," he muttered. "I like a woman to keep her backbone and guts the way I like to keep mine. Then when you do need each other you got something to turn to, not just a jelly."

He sounded just like her mother, she thought, but he didn't hear her say so for he was grinding to a stop before the Pilot Ship. She would be late getting back to the big house for dinner but she didn't care. She was free now, she thought, or in the process of being freed. He switched off the car lights, and took off her rug. For a little while they held each other very close. We could have a house, and a garden, and a family, and live like people, she thought dreamily, and after a while a man named John and a girl named Nancy would be distant shadows.

"Well?" Gordon's mouth grazed her ear. "What is it you want?"

"The Rock of Gibraltar," she said.

Sitting at the window of her bedroom Miss Lesley kept one hand on the curtain, drawing it back to peer out at the snowy night. A dozen times she had asked the nurse or Cathy what time it was and whether they were back yet. Now that she was helpless they were ignoring her, but she could tell what was going on someplace, they couldn't fool her, and she would send them packing, or send him at least, but it would do no good, she sobbed weakly, they would find a way. There were two of them and only one of her and they could leave her. She was their slave and would be till she died, afraid of being deserted, afraid of other people loving, afraid above all of lovers.